World Council of Churches

THE CHURCHES IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Reports
2010–2013

The Churches in International Affairs

Reports 2010-2013

Commission of the Churches on InternationalAffairs
of the World Council of Churches

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
of the World Council of Churches

Ecumenical Centre
P.O. Box 2100
150, route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

Tel. +41.22.791.61.11
Fax +41.22.791.03.61
E-mail: ccia@wcc-coe.org
Website: http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/ccia

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
of the World Council of Churches
Ecumenical UN Office

Church Center for the United Nations
777 United Nations Plaza, Suite 9D
New York, NY 10017
U.S.A.
Tel. +1.212.867.58.90
Fax +1.212.867.74.62
E-mail: unlo@wcc-coe.org
Website: http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/wcc-un-office-new-york

ISBN: 978-2-8254-1652-5

© Copyright 2014 by the World Council of Churches
150, route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
Website: http://www.oikoumene.org

IN MEMORIAM

Lois McCullough Dauwey

1948 – 2014

A devoted ecumenical colleague,
whoserved as a member of the CCIA,
Moderator of the WCC Programme Committee,
member of the Executive and Central Committees,
from the United Methodist Church, USA

CONTENTS

MODERATOR'S INTRODUCTION 19

DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION 21

GLOBAL CONCERNS 23

Environmental justice *23*

Economic justice 23

- Oral statement presented by WCC staff to the UN General Assembly hearing with civil society on the Millennium Development Goals, New York, U.S.A., 15 June 2010 23
- "Buddhist-Christian Common Word on Structural Greed" issued by participants at the end of a co-sponsored WCC-LWF meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 22-26 August 2010 26
- Letter from the WCC's general secretary to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations, on the occasion of the high-level UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals, 24 September 2010 28
- Joint statement by the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Council of World Mission and the World Council of Churches, at the global ecumenical conference on a "New International Financial and Economic Architecture", São Paulo, Brazil, 5 October 2012 30

Climate change 40

- Minute on UNFCCC Conference of Parties – COP 15 in Copenhagen adopted by the WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010.....40g
- Letter from WCC to Rev. Dr Joel C. Hunter of the Northland Church in Florida, U.S.A., welcoming the "Blessed Earth Initiative", 22 April 2010 42
- Joint ecumenical declaration co-presented by the WCC at the "World people's conference on climate change and the rights of Mother Earth", 22 April 2010 43
- Report issued at the conclusion of a conference to put the rights of "climate refugees" on the agenda of the international community, 3-4 May 2010 44
- A joint WCC-CEC AGAPE consultation: "Linking poverty, wealth and ecology: ecumenical perspectives in Europe - Budapest call for climate justice", 12 November 2010 54
- The "Budapest ecumenical youth declaration" issued at the end of a joint WCC-CEC consultation on poverty, wealth and ecology in Europe, 12 November 2010 58
- Statement delivered at the high-level ministerial segment of the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UNFCCC and the 6th session of the Meeting of the Parties (CPM6) to the Kyoto Protocol, Cancún, México 10 December 2010..... 59
- Joint statement issued by the WCC and LWF delegations to COP16, 13 December 2010..... 60
- Joint letter by 25 NGOs to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations regarding the creation of a special procedure on climate change and human rights, 28 February 2011..... 61
- Statement by WCC general secretary on the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP 17), 23 November 2011 63
- Statement by the World Council of Churches read at the high-level segment of the 17th Conference of Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Durban, South Africa, 9 December 2011..... 64
- Message from WCC general secretary to the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and Peoples' Summit, 13 June 2012 66
- Statement from the WCC delivered at the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to the high-level ministerial segment of COP 18 in Doha Qatar, 7 December 2012 68
- Minute on climate justice adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 201369
- WCC statement to the high-level ministerial segment of the 19th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP19 to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 9th session of the meeting of the parties – CMP9 to the Kyoto Protocol, 22 November 2013 71

Water 72

- Statement issued by participants of the Ecumenical Water Network, with strategies to address the issue of rights of communities to water and sanitation in Asia, 28 November – 3 December 2010 73
- Statement of the WCC Ecumenical Water Network adopted at their strategic consultation, Berlin, Germany, 10-12 June 2013..... 75

Health ***84***
- Joint statement, co-signed by WCC general secretary, from the summit of high-level religious leaders on HIV and AIDS, 23 March 2010 84
- Declaration made at the South African regional consultation on "Healing of memories: reconciliation between people, cultures and religion", Cape Town, South Africa, 11 September 2010 85
- Statement on precautionary concern over organisms produced by synthetic DNA technology addressed to the chair of the United States of America Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues, 1 October 2010 88
- Minute on strengthening the ecumenical response to HIV/AIDS adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011 90
- Summary of oral interventions at the Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, 16-25 May 2011 92
- Oral interventions at the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, 21-26 May 2012 93
- Statement by CMC Churches Action for Health at the WHO's 132nd Executive Board meeting on item 15.2(e) on climate change and health, 29 January 2013 97

Human rights ***99***
- Statement on the right to water and sanitation adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-S22 February 2011 99
- Joint written statement submitted by non-governmental organizations at the UN Human Rights Council's sixteenth session, item 3, on the human right to peace and freedom of religion or belief, 22 February 2011 101
- Letter of concern to Dr Kishore Singh, special rapporteur to the Right of Education of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, regarding the right to education in Chile, 25 November 2011 106
- Communiqué adopted at the World Council of Churches international study consultation on "Freedom of religion and rights of religious minorities", Istanbul, Turkey, 28 November-2 December 2011 107
- Communiqué adopted at the WCC international consultation on "Human rights of stateless people" in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 16-18 December 2011 109
- Oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's 19th Session on item 3, expressing concern on intensified violent evictions of urban poor communities in the Philippines and the continuing violations of the right to adequate housing, March 2012 112
- Letter from the WCC's general secretary to Ms Navanethem Pillay, UN high commissioner for Human Rights, denouncing the arrest and unlawful detention of Archbishop Jovan (Vranisovski) of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 4 May 2012 114
- Joint oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, Argentina (APDH) at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th Session, expressing concern for the Argentinian deaf community, June 2012 115
- Joint oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC, at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th session on item 4, human rights situation in West Papua, Indonesia, June 2012 116
- Joint oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, Argentina (APDH) at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th Session, condemning the systematic and permanent violations of human rights and the international humanitarian law against the civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territories by the State of Israel, July 2012 118
- Reflections by the WCC general secretary on female genital mutilation, 6 December 2012 119
- Communiqué from consultation on "Towards an ecumenical advocacy on the rights of stateless people", Washington, D.C., United States, 27 February to 1 March 2013 120
- Statement on the politicization of religion and rights of religious minorities, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 122
- Statement on the human rights of stateless people, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 129

Interreligious relations and dialogue ***133***
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the heads of Muslim religious communities worldwide on the occasion of Eid al Fitr, 8 September 2010 133
- Statement issued by participants at an international consultation on Muslim-Christian relations, Geneva, Switzerland, 4 November 2010 134
- Letter of greetings from the WCC's general secretary to the heads of Muslim religious communities on the occasion of Eid al Fitr, 31 August 2011 139
- Statement by WCC general secretary urging non-violence and respect for religions following the release of U.S. film on Islam, 14 September 2012 140
- Joint communiqué of the 6th meeting for dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, Iran and the WCC, Geneva, 17 – 18 September 2012 141

Just and inclusive communities **144**

Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) **144**

- Statement adopted at EDAN women's conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2 March 2013 144

Indigenous Peoples **145**

- Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples, adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012 145
- Minute of support for the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, adopted by the WCC central committee, Kolympari, Crete, 25 August–5 September 2012 148
- Minute on Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 149

Migration **150**

- Minute on the rights of migrants and migrant workers adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011 150

Peace and disarmament ***153***

Peace **153**

- Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), Kingston, Jamaica, 24 May 2011 153
- Congratulations by the WCC general secretary to the recipients of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, 7 October 2011 156
- "Statement on the way of Just Peace" adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 157

Disarmament **162**

- Comment by WCC general secretary on international majority commitments to curb the potential use of cluster bombs and nuclear weapons, 29 November 2011 162
- Statement on the need for a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty, adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012 163
- Joint statement by the leadership of the WCC, World Evangelical Alliance, Pax Christi International and Caritas, regarding the inclusion of ammunition in the negotiation of the first global Arms Trade Treaty, 20 July 2012 166
- Statement of concern by WCC general secretary following the delay in the proposed adoption of a global Arms Trade Treaty, 27 July 2012 167
- Joint communiqué adopted at the Humanitarian Disarmament Campaigns Summit, New York, U.S.A., 21 October 2012 168
- Communiqué adopted at the international consultation on "Ecumenical advocacy to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa", Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24 November 2012 169
- Public comment by the WCC general secretary on the adoption of the world's first Arms Trade Treaty, 3 April 2013 172
- Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for their Nobel Peace Prize award, 14 October 2013 173

Nuclear weapons **173**

- Statement by WCC general secretary on the signing of the new strategic arms reduction treaty by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama, 8 April 2010 173
- Joint statement co-signed by the WCC presented at the NPT Review Conference on the reduction of tactical nuclear weapons, 14 May 2010 174
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Ambassador Helmut Hoffmann, permanent representative of Germany to the UN Conference on Disarmament, stressing the important role of Germany in the process of disarmament, 11 June 2010 176
- Letter from the WCC general secretary to H.E. Ambassador John Duncan, permanent representative of the United Kingdom to the UN Conference on Disarmament, stressing the important role of the United Kingdom in the process of disarmament, 11 June 2010 177
- Public Statement to reconsider the role of nuclear weapons in NATO's Strategic Concept 2010 issued by the Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in cooperation with the WCC and Dutch IKV Pax Christi, Brussels, Belgium, 23 July 2010 178
- Public statement by WCC general secretary on the 65th Anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 5 August 2010 185
- Public statement by WCC general secretary on the ratification of the new strategic arms reduction treaty, 23 December 2010 186
- Follow-up letter to the president of the U.S.A., the president of the Russian Federation, and the NATO secretary general, on the adoption of NATO's strategic concept and next steps, 11 March 2011 187

- Statement by WCC general secretary on the 66th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 6 and 9 August 1945, 5 August 2011 190
- Joint letter to the president of the UN Conference on Disarmament, affirming the need for substantive work by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, 9 March 2012 192
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Dmitry Medvedev, president of the Russian Federation, on the issue of Russian tactical nuclear weapons, 27 March 2012 193
- Statement by WCC general secretary, urging the NATO summit in Chicago 20-21 May to "lead by example" and withdraw NATO nuclear weapons still deployed in Europe, 15 May 2012 194
- Letter from the WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Nahas Angula, prime minister of the Republic of Namibia, congratulating the government on its recent ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 8 June 2012 195
- Public comment by WCC general secretary on the 68th anniversary of atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 5 August 2013 196

Women ***198***

- Statement by the WCC made at the 2010 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) high-level segment in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women, 30 April 2010 198
- Statement from the international encounter between Orthodox women and Christians from other traditions, Tirana, Albania, 8-12 July 2010 200
- Oral statement delivered by the CCIA at the UN 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, supporting women's initiatives against violence, New York, U.S.A., 25 March 2013 202

REGIONAL CONCERNS 204

Africa ***204***

- Declaration of commitment to human rights, statement signed by church leaders from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, 17 April 2010 204
- International consultation organized by the WCC/CCIA and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) on "Peace and security in Africa: ecumenical responses", Kigali, Rwanda, 28 January – 1 February 2012 205
- Joint statement by the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches, on the escalating armed conflict between Sudan and South Sudan, 18 April 2012 207
- Statement by WCC deputy general secretary following armed attacks on Christian churches during church services in Kano and Maiduguri, Nigeria, and in Nairobi, Kenya, 30 April 2012 207

Côte d'Ivoire **208**

- Statement by WCC general secretary expressing concern regarding the on-going violence in Côte d'Ivoire, 5 April 2011 208
- Final communiqué from the ecumenical solidarity visit to Ivory Coast, 28 November-4 December 2011 209

Democratic Republic of Congo **210**

- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Joseph Kabila, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo on the suspicious death of Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, 4 June 2010 210
- Minute on the situation in Democratic Republic of Congo, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 211

Horn of Africa **213**

- Statement by WCC general secretary calling for urgent action in the Horn of Africa, 18 August 2011 213

Kenya **213**

- Tribute by the WCC general secretary to the late Professor Dr Wangari Maathai of Kenya, 7 October 2011 . 213
- Letter to Kenyan president H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta following the massacre that took place at the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi beginning 21 September 2013, 1 October 2013 214
- Solidarity message to the WCC member churches in Kenya following the massacre that took place at the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi beginning 21 September 2013, 1 October 2013 215

Liberia **216**

- Report on visit to Liberia of ecumenical observers team appointed by the WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in advance of elections scheduled to take place on 11 October 2011, 7 – 12 August 2011 216

Libya **221**
- Resolution on the escalation of violence in Libya adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011 ... 221
- Joint statement issued by the WCC, the Conference of European Churches and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, calling for a broader response to the humanitarian crisis in and around Libya, 1 April 2011 221
- Statement by the WCC general secretary calling for peace talks in Libya, 4 May 2011 ... 222

Nigeria **223**
- Letter of concern over renewed violence in northern Nigeria, sent to H. E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, acting president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 10 March 2010 ... 223
- Solidarity message from WCC general secretary to the WCC member churches in Nigeria regarding the massacres that took place in three villages close to the city of Jos, 11 March 2010 ... 224
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, acting president of Nigeria, expressing profound sorrow at the passing of president Mr Umaru Yar' Ardua, 11 May 2010 ... 225
- Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, the new president of Nigeria, on his swearing in, 11 May 2010 ... 225
- Follow-up action on the February 2010 WCC executive committee decision regarding the violation of human rights in the Niger Delta and Northern Nigeria: report from the "Living letters" pastoral solidarity visit to Nigeria, 15-20 May 2010 ... 226
- Statement of the WCC executive committee on the situation in Nigeria, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010 ... 233
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the secretary general of the United Nations, following the 26 August bombing of the UN building in Abuja, Nigeria, 30 August 2011 ... 235
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, President of the Republic of Nigeria, expressing deep sadness over the current wave of violence in Nigeria, 26 January 2012 ... 236
- Joint statement issued by a high-level international delegation of Christian and Muslim leaders promoting interreligious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions, 25 May 2012 ... 237
- Communiqué on joint commitment of the WCC and the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (RABIIT) following the high-level interreligious delegation's visit to Nigeria, 22-26 May 2012 ... 238

Sierra Leone **239**
- Report from WCC delegation visit to Sierra Leone expressing deep concern over deplorable prison conditions, 1 November 2011 ... 239

Somalia **240**
- Statement adopted by WCC executive committee on a call to promote peace and human security in Somalia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-16 September 2011 ... 240

South Africa **242**
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Mr Edwin Makue, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, on the death of Mrs Sheena Duncan, 6 May 2010 ... 242
- 80th Birthday greetings from WCC general secretary to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 7 October 2011 ... 243
- Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the Marikana-Lonmin massacre, Kolympari, Crete, Greece, 28 August–25 September 2012 ... 244
- A tribute to Nelson Mandela by WCC general secretary, 6 December 2013 ... 245

South Sudan **247**
- Statement of the WCC executive committee on the upcoming referendum in Southern Sudan, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010 ... 247
- Letter from WCC general secretary to General Salva Kiir Mayardit, president of the Republic of South Sudan, on the day of declaring independence of South Sudan, 7 July 2011 ... 248
- Statement on the current critical situation of Abyei in South Sudan, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 ... 249
- Letter from WCC general secretary to President Salva Kiir Mayardit, expressing profound concern for the people of the nation, 16 December 2013 ... 251
- WCC calls for a "Mandela moment" in South Sudan, 17 December 2013 ... 252

Sudan **253**
- WCC and the World Evangelical Alliance speak with a common voice on the January 2011 referendum in Sudan, November 11, 2010 ... 253
- Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC member churches regarding the January 2011 referenda in South Sudan and in the Diaspora, 17 December 2010 ... 256

- Statement by WCC's general secretary on the situation of escalating violence against civilians in Sudan's disputed South Kordofan State, 10 June 2011 256
- Joint statement by WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches regarding the increasing incidents of attacks on Christians and destruction of church property in Sudan, 24 April 2012 258
- Joint statement by WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches following the demolition of an Episcopal parish church in Khartoum on orders of Sudanese government authorities, 22 June 2012 259

Uganda **260**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to The Most Rev. Henry Luke Orombi, CEO of the Church of the Province of Uganda regarding terrorist attacks against innocent civilians in Kampala, 19 July 2010 260

Asia-Pacific **262**
- Call by Asian church leaders at consultation on "Peace and security in Asia: ecumenical response" for deeper involvement and ecumenical advocacy actions, Bangkok, Thailand, 2-6 August 2011 262
- Communiqué on Asia's human security challenges, 12 June 2013 263

Afghanistan **267**
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the secretary general of the United Nations, on the killing of eight staff members of the United Nations Operation Centre in northern Afghanistan, 5 April 2011 267

Aotearoa-New Zealand **267**
- Pastoral letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Aotearoa-New Zealand following the devastating earthquake of February 2011, 23 February 2011 267

Australia **268**
- Statement of the "Living letters" ecumenical solidarity team visit to the Indigenous Peoples of the Northern Territory of Australia, 12-17 September 2010 268
- Statement on the situation of Indigenous Peoples of Australia adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16–22 February 2011 271
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the Honourable Julia Gillard, prime minister of Australia, appealing to the Government of Australia to respect the wishes of the Yolngu Nations Assembly, 11 June 2012 273

Bangladesh **274**
- Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Bangladesh, expressing concern over the recent workplace tragedies, 17 May 2013 274

Democratic People's Republic of Korea **275**
- Call by the steering committee of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reconciliation, Reunification and Development in the Korean Peninsula (EFK), to end the strategy of using food as a political weapon, 27 June 2011 275
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the chairperson of the Korean Christian Federation in the DPR of Korea, and the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of the DPR of Korea to the United Nations, on the passing of Kim Jong Il, 20 December 2011 277

Fiji **277**
- Reports of the "Living letters" ecumenical solidarity team visit to the Fiji Islands, 27–29 May 2010 277
- Statement by WCC general secretary, expressing deep concern about the blatant violation of freedom of religion by the Fiji authorities, 26 August 2011 281

French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) **282**
- Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the re-inscription of French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) on the UN list of countries to be decolonized, Kolympari, Crete, Greece, 28 August–5 September 2012 282
- Report from visit of an ecumenical delegation to Tahiti regarding the need for re-inscription of French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) on the United Nations list of countries to be decolonized, 26 April – 2 May 2013 283

India **285**
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, at the passing away of Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, 9 April 2010 285
- Statement issued at the WCC and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) consultation on caste-based discrimination, 22-24 October 2010 286
- Open Letter of solidarity to Buddhist brothers and sisters expressing sorrow and solidarity over the blasts in the Mahabodhi temple complex in Bodh Gaya, India on 7 July 2013, 16 July 2013 289

Indonesia **290**
- Statement on the situation in Tanah Papua (Indonesia) adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012 ... 290

Japan **292**
- Call by WCC general secretary to the churches around the world to pray for Japan and the Japanese people, following the devastating earthquake and tsunami, 12 March 2011 ... 292
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Japan, expressing the dismay and sorrow of the world wide church community following the devastating earthquake and tsunami, 23 March 2011 ... 293
- Message of solidarity from the WCC general secretary to the "Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan", Republic of Korea, 30 November 2011 ... 294
- Statement by the WCC on the first anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in Japan, 11 March 2012 ... 296
- Public comment by WCC general secretary on the 68th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 5 August 2013 ... 297

Korean Peninsula **298**
- Statement by WCC general secretary on resolving the rising tensions over the Korean Peninsula, 15 February 2013 ... 298
- Statement on peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 ... 299

Malaysia **304**
- Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to the churches in Malaysia regarding attacks on churches and church buildings due to the controversy over the use of the word "Allah" for God by non-Muslims, 13 January 2010 ... 304

Myanmar **305**
- Statement of the WCC executive committee on free and fair elections in Myanmar, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010 ... 305
- Report of Living Letters solidarity visit to Myanmar, 28 October-3 November 2010 ... 307
- Report from ecumenical solidarity visit to Myanmar, 4-9 August 2011 ... 309
- Minute adopted by the WCC central committee on churches' participation in reconciliation and peace-building amidst ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, Kolympari, Crete, Greece, 28 August–5 September 2012 ... 310

Pakistan **312**
- Letters of concern from the WCC general secretary to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president, and Mr Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, prime minister of Pakistan, regarding the killing of Christians arrested under the blasphemy laws of the country, 23 July 2010 ... 312
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the Rt. Rev. Samuel Azariah, moderator of the Church of Pakistan, expressing the solidarity of the WCC and all WCC member churches to their Pakistani brethren as they face catastrophic floods, 3 August 2010 ... 313
- Letter from the WCC's general secretary to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president of Pakistan, expressed solidarity in the face of the overwhelming humanitarian crisis affecting the country resulting from the worst floods in the history of Pakistan, 3 August 2010 ... 314
- Minute of the of the WCC executive committee on the current situation in Pakistan, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010 ... 315
- Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to Pakistan's Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani regarding the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Pakistan government Minister for Minority Affairs, 2 March 2011 ... 316
- Visit of the WCC general secretary to Pakistan, calling for protection of minorities, 8-10 October 2011 ... 317
- Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages in Pakistan; Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012 ... 317
- Communiqué from public hearing on the "Misuse of blasphemy law and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan", organized by the WCC/CCIA, 19 September 2012 ... 319
- Letter of concern to WCC member churches and the National Council of Churches in Pakistan regarding attacks on Christian minorities, 12 March 2013 ... 320
- Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Pakistan on church bombings in Peshawar, 23 September 2013 ... 321
- Open letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, prime minister of Pakistan regarding a recent series of bomb attacks, 3 October 2013 ... 322

People's Republic of China **323**
- Public message from WCC general secretary regarding the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2010 to Liu Xiaobo, 14 October 2010 ... 323

- Message from WCC general secretary on the 25th anniversary of Amity Foundation, 5 November 2010 324
- Message from WCC general secretary to the China Christian Council in tribute to Bishop K.H. Ting, 23 November 2012 324

Philippines **326**

- Letter from WCC general secretary to the president of the Philippines, Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, expressing deep concern over the arrest of Dr Alex Montes and 42 other health workers, 11 February 2010 . 326
- Joint oral intervention made at UNHCR's fourteenth session expressing concern at the continuing human rights violations in the country, 8 June 2010 327
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. President Benigno Aquino III, president of the Philippines denouncing the continuing human rights violations in the country, 30 June 2010 328
- Statement by Living Letters delegation to the Philippines, 4 December 2010 328
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. President Benigno Aquino III, president of the Philippines expressing appreciation at his decision to release the 43 health professionals and community health workers and to drop all charges against them, 21 December 2010 330
- Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's (HRC) 16th session on arbitrary arrest and detention in the Philippines, 7 March 2011 330
- Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th session on Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, 10 March 2011 331
- Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th session on Human Rights Defenders regarding outstanding cases of attacks and extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines, 13 March 2011 333
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Benigno S. Aquino III, president of the Philippines, expressing concern about the continued violations of human rights, harassment, torture and extrajudicial killings, 30 March 2012 334
- Oral intervention at the UN Human Rights Council's 21st session regarding the report of the working group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on the Philippines, expressing concern on extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders, 20 September 2012 335
- World Council of Churches voices solidarity with Haiyan victims, 12 November 2013 336

Republic of Korea **337**

- Letter from WCC general secretary to the churches and the National Council of Churches in Korea, expressing deep concern for the people of the Korean peninsula following the sinking of the South Korean vessel Cheonan, 3 June 2010 337
- Statement of expression of concern on tensions on the Korean Peninsula, issued by WCC general secretary, 24 November 2010 338
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary on the passing away of Dr Kang Moon-Kyu, 18 December 2013 338

South Asia **339**

- South Asia ecumenical forum on peace and security condemns religious intolerance in South Asia and expresses concerns on deteriorating peace and security in several South Asian countries, Delhi, India, 18-19 April 2011 339
- Minute on peace and security in South Asia adopted by the WCC executive committee, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-16 September 2011 349

Thailand **351**

- Solidarity message to the Church of Christ in Thailand expressing deep sorrow at the upsurge of violence, 19 May 2010 351

Europe ***353***

Armenia **353**

- Joint message from WCC general secretary and CEC interim general secretary on the occasion of the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, 14 April 2011 353
- Minute on 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 354

Cyprus **355**

- Letters from WCC general secretary to H.E. Ms Navanethem Pillay, UN high commissioner for Human Rights and Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, regarding the ceasing of worship/refusing to give permission to hold services at two Christian churches by the Turkish Cypriot police in Cyprus on Christmas day, 28 January 2011 355

- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Archbishop of Cyprus Chryostomos II strongly denouncing the actions of the Turkish Cypriot authorities in stopping the Christmas day service of a church in Rizokarpaso, 28 January 2011 356
- Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to H.B. Archbishop of Cyprus, denouncing the continued violations of religious freedom and freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the Republic of Cyprus, 20 April 2012 356
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Cyprus, expressing support of the religious track of the Cyprus peace process, 19 March 2013 357
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the UN in Geneva, expressing support of the Religious Track of the Cyprus peace process, 19 March 2013 359

***European Union* 360**
- Message of congratulations from WCC general secretary to the European Union on being the recipient of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, 12 October 2012 360
- Open letter from the general secretaries of the WCC and CEC to the members of the European Union appealing for a just and sustainable solution to the crisis in Greece, 21 November 2012 361

***Federal Republic of Germany* 362**
- Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Joachim Gauck, the newly-elected president of the Federal Republic of Germany, 20 March 2012 362
- Joint oral intervention by CCIA and the Forum Human Rights Germany on the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council, of Germany, 19 September 2013 362

***France* 363**
- Statement by WCC general secretary condemning hate crimes in France, 22 March 2012 363

***Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* 364**
- Minute adopted by the WCC central committee on the unlawful detention of Archbishop Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church; Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012 .. 364

***Greece* 365**
- Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the current financial and economic crisis with a focus on Greece, Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012 365

***Hungary* 367**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the president and the prime minister of the Republic of Hungary expressing concern on the transfer of a convicted military officer, Lt. Ramil Safarov, back to his native country of Azerbaijan, 1 September 2012 367

***Italy* 368**
- Statement by WCC general secretary, welcoming the landmark ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on migrants' right of non-refoulement, 23 February 2012 368
- Statement of concern by WCC general secretaryover the death of migrants off the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, 4 October 2013 369

***Norway* 369**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Bishop Gunnar Stålsett of the Church of Norway on the occasion of his receiving the Medal of the Order of Timor-Leste, 16 November 2010 370
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary and central committee moderator to the Christian Council of Norway, expressing deep shock and sadness caused by the attacks perpetrated in Oslo and on Utoyea, 29 July 2011 370
- Reflections by WCC general secretary on the tragedy in Norway, 16 August 2011 371

***Poland* 372**
- Letters from the WCC deputy general secretary expressing condolences upon hearing of the plane crash in Smolensk in which 97 leading figures from Poland lost their lives, 12 April 2010 372

***Republic of Albania* 375**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania, on the occasion of his receiving the Skanderberg medal in recognition of his merits in the field of interreligious dialogue, 22 April 2010 375
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, expressing concern at the methodology and results of the Albania Census 2011, 1 May 2013 376
- Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries expressing concern about violent incidents at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, in Premeti, 28 August 2013 377

- Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries to H.E. Mr Edi Rama, prime minister of the Republic of Albania, expressing concern about violent incidents at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, in Premeti, 16 September 2013 379

Russian Federation **380**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to His Holiness Kyrill I, patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, expressing shock at the terrorist attacks in the Moscow metro, 30 March 2010 380
- Joint letter by the WCC and CEC to His Holiness Kyrill I, patriarch of Moscow and All Russia following the bombing at Domodedovo Airport, 25 January 2011 380

Spain **381**
- Joint letter from WCC and CEC to H.E. D. José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, president of Spain, regarding inability of retired pastors of minority churches to receive a state pension, 21 January 2010 381
- Condolence message by WCC general secretary to the Roman Catholic archdiocese, expressing solidarity and offering prayers for the victims of train derailment in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 26 July 2013 383

Turkey **383**
- Public statement by WCC general secretary welcoming a Turkish government decree allowing for a better protection of the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities, 27 May 2010 383
- Visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Istanbul, Turkey, 3 March 2012 384

United Kingdom **386**
- Letter of condolence from the WCC general secretary to the Corrymeela Community on the death of Dr David Stevens, 26 May 2010 386

Vatican **387**
- Statement from WCC general secretary on election of the new pope, 14 March 2013 387

Latin America and Caribbean ***388***
- Statement on peace and human security in Latin America, adopted by the WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 5-8 March 2013 388

Argentina **390**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Bishop Frank de Nully Brown of the Evangelical Methodist Church in Argentina, regarding the conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the Malvinas Islands (Falkland Islands), 13 April 2012 390
- Letter from CCIA director to the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Argentina to the United Nations in Geneva condemning the burning of the temple of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina in Rosario, 3 October 2013 391
- Solidarity letter Pastor Frank de Nully Brown, Bishop of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina condemning the second vandalism attack on the Evangelical Church of Argentina in Buenos Aires, 16 November 2013 391

Brazil **392**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in Brazil in the wake of the landslides with assurance of the prayers of the worldwide church community, 27 January 2011 392
- Delivery of documents related to human rights issues during the military dictatorship from 1964-1985 to Brazil's public prosecutors by the WCC general secretary and the WCC central committee moderator, 14 June 2011 393
- Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's 18th session on general debate with special rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples and interactive dialogue with experts mechanism on Indigenous Peoples rights, 21 September 2011 394
- Meeting of WCC central committee moderator with the Brazilian minister for human rights, Maria do Rosário, expressing support of the WCC for the implementation of a truth commission in Brazil, 3 November 2011 .. 395
- Letter of condolence and concern from WCC general secretary to H.E. President Dilma Rousseff over the death of 230 students in the Santa Maria fire incident, 30 January 2013 396

Chile **397**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Dr Michelle Bachelet, president of Chile, offering condolences to the people of Chile after a powerful earthquake struck along the central coastline of the country, 1 March 2010. 397
- Rev. Charles Harper, former director of the WCC's Human Rights Office for Latin America from 1973 to 1992, was decorated with the Orden de Bernardo O'Higgins by Chile for his defence of human rights during the military dictatorship in Chile, 4 March 2010 398

Colombia **.....398**
- Minute on violence in Colombia adopted by the WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010..... 398
- Statement on the situation in Colombia adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011..... 400
- Letter from WCC associate general secretary to H.E. Juan Manual Santos, president of the Republic of Colombia, expressing concern about death threats against human rights defenders and partners in Colombia, 9 July 2012 402

Cuba **.....403**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to President Barack Obama, president of the United States of America (U.S.A.) and Mrs Michelle Obama, asking that the spouses of two Cubans imprisoned in the U.S.A. be allowed to visit their husbands, 19 March 2010..... 403
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. John L. McCullough, executive director and CEO of Church World Service and Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. regarding their request to President Barack Obama that religious travel restrictions to Cuba be lifted, 6 May 2010..... 404
- Resolution urging improved United States-Cuba relations and lifting of economic sanctions, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 405

Guatemala **.....406**
- Communiqué adopted at the WCC consultation on peace and human security in Latin America, organized by the WCC/CCIA in Antigua, Guatemala, 6 December 2012 406

Haïti **.....408**
- Statement by WCC general secretary expressing condolences and solidarity with the people of Haïti following the major earthquake, 13 January 2010 408
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Gerard Granado, general secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) regarding the need for collaboration to bring real and lasting development to Haïti, 22 January 2010..... 409
- Statement by WCC general secretary calling on the international community regarding the urgent need to cancel Haïti's foreign debt, 25 January 2010..... 410
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Ban Ki-Moon, secretary general of the United Nations, expressing condolences to the staff and families of colleagues based at the UN Mission in Haïti and reiterating the need for the cancellation of Haïti's external debt, 5 February 2010 412
- Letters from the WCC general secretary to leaders of the seven most industrialized countries (G7) welcoming their initiative to write off Haïti's debts, 8-9 February 2010 413
- Letter from WCC general secretary to The Honourable James M. Flaherty, minister of finance of Canada, requesting that Canada take the lead in asking the other G7 nations and the International Monetary Fund to join them in cancelling Haïti's debt, 20 May 2010..... 414
- Open letter from WCC general secretary to world government leaders and churches around the globe urging that the earthquake reconstruction process not be forgotten, 17 June 2010..... 415

Nicaragua **.....416**
- Declaration at Afro-descendent conference calling for churches to use education against racism, Managua, Nicaragua, 25 June 2011 416

Puerto Rico **.....418**
- Letter from the director of CCIA to Dr José de la Torre, president, and Mrs Igrí Rivera, president of the Board of Directors of the University of Puerto Rico, calling for steps to end the strike by the student community, 22 June 2010..... 418

Trinidad and Tobago **.....419**
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the Caribbean Conference of Churches in Trinidad and Tobago, invoking prayers for the people affected by Hurricane Sandy, 1 November 2012 419

Middle East **.....420**
- Minute on the presence and witness of Christians in the Middle East adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011 420
- Communiqué adopted at the Christian-Muslim consultation on "Christian presence and witness in the Arab world", Antelias, Lebanon, 27 January 2012..... 423
- Statement on asylum-seekers and human trafficking in the Sinai Desert adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012..... 424
- Joint statement issued at international ecumenical conference on Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, Notre-Dame du Mont Monastery, Lebanon, 25 May 2013..... 426

- Statement affirming the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013 431

Egypt **.....436**

- Letter from WCC general secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III expressing distress and concern at the news of the killing of Christians in Nag Hammadi, 14 January 2010..... 436
- Message from the WCC executive committee to member churches in Egypt regarding the security of Christians in Egypt, adopted at their meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010 437
- Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Sheikh Dr Muhammad Abd al-Aziz Wasil, the Ulama' of al-Azhar al-Sharif in Egypt, upon the passing away of Sheikh Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi, 11 March 2010. 438
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Pope Shenouda III expressing condolences at the news of the bomb attack on the Qeddiseen Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria on New Year's eve, 1 January 2011..... 438
- Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the attack on worshippers in the Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt during a New Year's midnight mass, 1 January 2011..... 439
- Report from the visit of a delegation to express the sympathy and support of WCC member churches to Pope Shenouda III in the aftermath of the lethal bomb attack on New Year's eve on a church in Alexandria, 8 January 2011..... 440
- Open statement from WCC general secretary regarding recent events throughout Egypt calling for a peaceful and timely resolution to the conflict, 31 January 2011 441
- Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to the churches in Egypt, expressing concerns about the recent incidents against the churches in Egypt and the increasing sectarian tensions witnessed by the country, 17 May 2011..... 441
- WCC's continued support for Egyptian Christians in their quest for justice, rejection of violence and initiatives for dialogue in the wake of 9 October clashes between peaceful protestors and the army in Cairo, 18 October 2011..... 442
- WCC Expression of concern over human trafficking in the Sinai Desert, 18 November 2011 443
- Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to Dr Mohamed Morsi, the newly elected president of Egypt, 26 June 2012 444
- Message of solidarity and support from WCC general secretary to member churches in Egypt on the country's political crisis, 10 July 2013 445
- Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Egypt calling for prayers for peace and expressing concern over the burning of churches and violence following protests on 14 August, 15 August 2013 446

Iran **.....446**

- Comment by WCC general secretary on Iran nuclear agreement, 27 November 2013..... 446

Iraq**.....447**

- Letter from WCC general secretary to the heads of churches in Iraq welcoming the news that a Council of Christian Church Leaders of Iraq had been established, 18 February 2010..... 447
- Follow-up action on the February 2010 WCC executive committee decision regarding the current situation of Christians in Iraq, 31 March 2010 448
- Public statement by WCC general secretary calling for an end to violence against Christians in Mosul and urging the Iraqi administration to bring stability and security to the country, 12 May 2010 449
- Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the 31 October 2010 attack on the Sayidat al-Nejat Church in Baghdad, 1 November 2010..... 450

Israel-Palestine **.....451**

- Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's thirteenth session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 22 March 2010 451
- Public statement by WCC general secretary regarding the Israeli military order redefining the notion of "infiltrator" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 21 April 2010..... 452
- Joint statement on a "theology of pilgrimage for Palestine" calling on Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land to show concern for the Palestinian people and the reality they face due to Israeli occupation, 21 May 2010 454
- Press release on World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 29 May to 4 June 2010, 31 May 2010 455
- Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the assault by Israeli naval forces on a Gaza-bound vessel, 1 June 2010..... 456
- Oral intervention made by WCC staff (EAPPI) at the UNHRC's fourteenth session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, condemning the Israeli naval forces storming of a Gaza-bound vessel carrying humanitarian aid in international waters, 2 June 2010..... 456
- Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UNHRC's fourteenth session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 14 June 2010 457
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the Methodist Church of Great Britain on the church's important and forward-looking resolutions regarding Just Peace for Palestine and Israel, 25 June 2010..... 458

- Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Lionel Osborn, president designate of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, regarding the important and forward-looking resolutions around the question of a Just Peace for Palestine and Israel, 2 July 2010 459
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Dr Gradye Parsons, stated clerk of the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), on the occasion of the church's 219th General Assembly, expressing appreciation at the churches' continued expressions of solidarity with Israeli and Palestinian peace-makers, 2 July 2010 460
- Oral intervention delivered by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 18th Session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, regarding large-scale evictions and demolitions in Area C of the West Bank, 26 September 2011 461
- Solidarity visit to Palestine-Israel by the WCC general secretary, WCC moderator, director of the CCIA and other WCC staff, 28 August- 2 September 2010 462
- Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the killing of four Israeli settlers near Hebron in the West Bank, 1 September 2010 466
- Open message from WCC general secretary to Middle East negotiators in Washington, D.C. on the final status of Jerusalem, the future of Palestinian Christians and the need for a Just Peace in the region, 2 September 2010 466
- Statement of WCC general secretary denouncing the burning of the Alliance Church in Jerusalem, 2 November 2010 467
- Resolution on the United States of America's veto against the UN Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the Palestinian Territories, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011 468
- Report from meeting addressing the theme "Violence in the name of God? Joshua in changing contexts", Hofgeismar, Germany, 23-27 February 2011 468
- Oral intervention delivered at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th Session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories regarding evictions and demolitions in East Jerusalem, 21 March 2011 470
- Oral intervention delivered by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories Art. 37 of the convention on the rights of the child, 21 March 2011 471
- Statement by WCC general secretary: expression of hope for Palestinian unity, 10 May 2011 472
- Statement by WCC general secretary on the application of Palestine to become a full member state of the United Nations, 28 September 2011 473
- Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 19th session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 19 March 2012 473
- Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 2 July 2012 474
- Joint written dubmission by WCC and Pax Christi International at the UN Human Rights Council's 21st session on the status of Jerusalem, 10–28 September 2012 476
- Statement of concern from WCC general secretary on the escalation of violence in Gaza and Israel, 16 November 2012 478
- Letter from WCC general secretary to President Mahmoud Abbas highlighting the Palestinian resilience and peaceful resistance to the occupation, 16 January 2013 479
- Oral intervention at the UN Human Rights Council 22nd Session, calling on the government of Israel to cease using live ammunition against civilians and to hold independent investigations into incidents causing death or injury of civilians, 18 March 2013 480
- Oral intervention at the UN Human Rights Council 23rd session, calling on the government of Israel to facilitate the access of all children to school, 10 June 2013 481

Saudi Arabia **482**

- Statement by WCC general secretary regarding the Fatwa of Saudi Arabia's grand mufti endorsing the destruction of churches, 18 April 2012 482

Syria **483**

- Letter of solidarity from the WCC's general secretary to the churches in Syria, expressing concern regarding the recent events in Syria, 17 May 2011 483
- Statement by WCC general secretary calling to end the violence in Syria, 9 August 2011 484
- Message from WCC executive committee to all Churches in Syria, extending solidarity as they face enormous challenges due to the ongoing violence in the country, 20 February 2012 485
- Statement by WCC general secretary condemning the violence occurring in Syria, 29 May 2012 486
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Ban Ki-moon, secretary-general of the United Nations, requesting that the UN give a stronger and clearer mandate to Kofi Annan's initiative for peace in Syria, 25 June 2012 487
- Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the crisis in Syria, Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012 488

- Statement by WCC general secretary condemning violence against religious leaders and religious communities, 28 June 2013 489
- Message from WCC general secretary condemning the use of chemical weapons and calling on the Syrian government and the UN to fulfil its responsibility to protect the Syrian people, 27 August 2013 490
- Open letter from WCC general secretary to the United Nations Security Council invoking prayers for peace and condemning the use of chemical weapons, 4 September 2013 492
- Communiqué adopted at the WCC international consultation on the crisis in Syria, Geneva, 18 September 2013 492
- Call from WCC general secretary to pray for the safe return of persons recently abducted and kidnapped, 21 December 2013 494

North America ***495***

Canada **495**

- Letter from WCC general secretary to Prime Minister Stephen Harper calling on the Canadian government to "listen carefully" to the concerns of Canada's Indigenous leaders, 11 January 2013 495

United States of America **496**

- Statement on churches' attitudes and responses to racism issued at the end of a conference organized by the WCC in partnership with the United Church of Christ (UCC) and Dutch missionary and diaconal agency, Kerk in Actie, 26–29 August 2010 496
- Message from WCC general secretary, honouring the anniversary of 11 September 2001, 7 September 2011 500
- Letter from WCC general secretary to member communions of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, invoking prayers for the people affected by Hurricane Sandy, 1 November 2012 501
- Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to Barack Obama following his re-election as president of the United States, 7 November 2012 502
- Message of condolence and support from WCC general secretary for the people of Sandy Hook and Newtown, in the wake of the school shooting in Connecticut, 17 December 2012 503

CCIA MEMBERSHIP 504

CCIA STAFF AND INTERNS 505

ABBREVIATIONS 507

MODERATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Significant changes have been taking place in the world during the second half of the period between the Ninth Assembly, leading up to the Tenth assembly of the WCC, which was held in October 2013. This particular period also witnessed anxieties and uncertainties in international relations and the effects of them posed many challenges to the churches and the ecumenical movement. The CCIA, which has been mandated to address the emerging global issues, tried to address several of those concerns during the past four years through various processes and programmatic actions.

There were several milestones in the history of WCC and the CCIA during the period. The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) – a remarkable and historic ecumenical event and the biggest since the Ninth WCC Assembly – inspired many churches and groups around the world and strengthened their commitment to justice and peace, especially in the context of the Tenth Assembly and its theme, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace". The Ecumenical Call to Just Peace created a new momentum in the area of advocacy on building communities of peace.

The two CCIA Commission meetings held in Albania (2010) and in the People's Republic of China (2012) and an additional meeting of the working groups in Jamaica (2011) streamlined the programmatic thrusts of the CCIA. The regrouping of the CCIA in four working groups dealing with peace and security, freedom of religion, rights of migrant workers and stateless people and peace in the community with a focus on Millennium Development Goals provided impetus for major programmatic actions undertaken by the CCIA and its advocacy initiatives at the global, regional and national levels during the last four years of its mandate, before it ended the current term.The engagements of the CCIA through various working groups included a three-year study on "Freedom of religion and rights of religious minorities" with emphasis on "Politicization of religion and religionization of politics". Three study consultations held in Istanbul, Turkey, Thessaloniki, Greece and Havana, Cuba with the participation of experts involved in the field finalized the study process.

Other significant pieces of work included a study on "Rights of migrant workers in the Arabian Gulf region", a study process and a series of consultations on peace and human security with focus and emphasis on regions such as Africa, Asia and Latin America; regional and global consultations on rights of stateless people, advocacy initiatives and consultations on the campaign against small arms and light weapons in Africa; UN advocacy week actions in New York and Geneva in conjunctions with different UN events focused on countries and issues such as Columbia, Nigeria, Palestine, Middle East, Pakistan, Myanmar, Climate Displaced People, Rights of Indigenous Peoples, etc.

The pastoral solidarity visits organized by the CCIA to various conflict-affected areas and situations demonstrated WCC's commitment to and accompaniment of people and communities suffering and struggling for peace with justice, human rights and human dignity. Those areas and countries included Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Northern Territories of Australia, Cambodia, Guatemala, Columbia, Uruguay, Bolivia, Honduras, and French Polynesia. The advocacy on the right to self-determination of the people of French Polynesia was on the agenda of the CCIA ever since the local churches requested WCC's accompaniment in their struggle. The other advocacy initiatives facilitated and coordinated by the CCIA during this period also cover issues such as peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula, peace and

security in South Asia, Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala, peace and reconciliation in Colombia, peace process in South Sudan, electoral reforms in Africa, Middle East peace process, especially in the contexts of the Arab spring and democratization, peace in Syria, etc.

While engaged in various advocacy actions, as usual the WCC governing bodies and the general secretary from time to time issued statements and letters of concerns addressing pertinent issues. All such important documents as well as minutes, reports and communiques from various consultations and conferences including the public issues actions adopted by the Tenth Assembly of WCC are included in this volume, "The Churches in International Affairs: 2010-2013". This is yet another effort of pooling together the resources of advocacy actions coordinated and facilitated by the CCIA during the past four years. This is also the reflection of the remarkable work carried out, facilitated and coordinated by the CCIA. As the moderator of the CCIA I express my profound thanks to all those who have been part of our efforts.

It is also gratifying to note that the current commission before ending its term provided advice to the leadership of the WCC and its newly elected governing board to revitalise the CCIA in future by way of restructuring the Commission and evolving a new composition of the CCIA in the post Tenth assembly period, which will be formed in the central committee meeting in July 2014.

Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik
Moderator, CCIA
Oslo, Norway 15 May 2014

DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) tried to address and respond to several important global, regional and national issues that warranted our attention and reflection during the years 2010-2013 covered in this report. Those issues covered in this report are based on situations and issues that had a direct bearing on the life of the churches which deserve closer attention by the WCC and the CCIA. The strength of the CCIA/WCC in advocacy include its member churches; its global constituencies; its long history; its experiences and credibility; its access to the UN and other international decision-makers; and its strong reputation among the broader civil society. Its weaknesses in advocacy are that because it is a global fellowship of churches based on principles that followed on consultations, it can appear to be slow to respond or quickly act in some contexts, and may not publically speak out on issues opposed by a member church. However, the unique role is that it is well positioned to provide an ecumenical space for advocacy at different levels.

During this period under review of the public issues actions and churches' role in international affairs (2010-2013), the CCIA had two full-fledged meetings of the commission – in Durrës, Albania in 2010 and in Shanghai and Nanjing in the People's Republic of China in 2012. Additionally we had another joint meeting of four CCIA working groups, which was held in Kingston, Jamaica in 2011. The year 2010 also coincided with the 50th meeting of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). The 51st meeting of the CCIA held in People's Republic of China was a landmark in the history of the WCC and the Chinese Churches. This was the first international ecumenical event permitted by the government to be hosted by the China Christian Council (CCC) ever since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1948.

It has been a privilege and honour for us to recognize the support and encouragement given to us by some renowned personalities working in the international arena who provided support as resource persons at various CCIA programmes: Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, the legendary democratic movement leader of Burma and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Dr Bertrand G. Ramcharan, United Nations special rapporteurs such as Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt (freedom of religion or belief), Prof. François Crépeau (human rights of migrants), and Ms Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (trafficking in persons, especially women and children), etc.; they are but a few among those personalities who helped us during the last four years of the commission. The 50thcommission meeting decided on several thematic foci for possible ecumenical engagements of advocacy on various issues and themes and priority areas for future ecumenical engagement in international advocacy. The 51st meeting of the commission received and analysed several study reports and public advocacy actions. The commission expressed its concern on a situation of fragmented advocacy roles for some time, especially CCIA's role in New York. It is gratifying that the leadership now took the decision to reinstate the mandate of the UNLO (recently renamed EUNO)/WCC again within the CCIA structure which will be helpful for effective advocacy coordination in future. The meeting in China also discussed in detail about the nature and structure of the current CCIA and its role in the post-Busan Assembly era. The commission and its core group reviewed the by-laws of the CCIA and made several proposals in order to be consistent with the overall structural and programmatic changes in WCC. New proposals on the composition of the membership of a new commission have been worked out by the CCIA core group in a meeting held in Oslo, Norway based on the recommendations and suggestions by the 51st meeting held in China.

The CCIA has been known for its unique role of coordinating the ecumenical advocacy on international affairs and also ensuring coherent and coordinated ecumenical approaches in our ecumenical actions. We have to often take on more tasks that can be adequately followed up. This also raises a question we have to often face on our capacity and the need for the WCC to be involved in every issue. This vital question is constantly being raised from many quarters including the commission. One of the main contributions during the period of the commission's work helped to sharpen the focus of the CCIA. The numerous issues covered in this report indicates the enormous volume of work WCC has been undertaking while responding to emerging global, regional and national issues. The CCIA is very soon approaching its existence of seven decades since it was founded in 1946. While being primarily an organ dealing with international affairs, of a fellowship of churches, we face numerous problems and challenges. However, we continue to be faithful to our call to be partakers of justice and peace for fullness of life of all God's people and their struggle. We are constantly reminded of the values of the prophetic witness.

While concluding the introduction to this volume, I would also like to add that I will conclude my work on 31st July 2014 as director of the CCIA for 5 years of service and a total of 14 years in WCC. I take this opportunity to thank profoundly the three general secretaries with whom I have closely worked during my tenure – Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia and Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. I have often been seeking advice and clarification on past CCIA issues from some former CCIA staff, especially four of my predecessors, former CCIA directors Dr Ninan Koshy, Rev. Dwain C. Epps, Mr Peter Weiderud and Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory and I thank them all. Let me also express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all my colleagues in the CCIA team, who have been making significant contributions.

Mathews George Chunakara
Director, CCIA
Geneva, 15 May 2014

GLOBAL CONCERNS

Environmental justice

Economic justice

- **Oral statement presented by WCC staff to the UN General Assembly hearing with civil society on the Millennium Development Goals, New York, U.S.A., 15 June 2010**

Tackling the roots of poverty

For Christian churches and the worldwide ecumenical movement, eradicating poverty is nothing less than a moral and ethical imperative. We believe that God's will is for all humanity – regardless of gender, religious belief, race and ethnicity – to experience life in fullness and in dignity. Thus, together with many civil society organizations (CSOs), we at the World Council of Churches (WCC) applauded the United Nations (UN) in 2000 for taking leadership in the articulation and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), foremost of which is the internationally agreed goal to halve the number of people "living" in poverty by 2015. Discussions on poverty eradication must continue to be a main concern of the UN, where broad participation of all nation-states and civil society could take place. As 2015 looms closer, there is an urgent need for the international community to revisit and deeply consider the structural, historical and interconnected roots of impoverishment and the required policy- and systemic transformations leading not just to the attainment of the MDGs but to the eventual eradication of poverty.

The WCC remains profoundly concerned that the global financial and economic crisis – which continues to wreak havoc on economies including in the Euro zone – has thrown tens of millions more people into poverty, swelling the ranks of the disempowered, hungry, thirsty, unemployed, sick and homeless, and further derailing the achievement of the MDGs. At this stage of the crisis, many countries are being forced to adopt stringent fiscal policies that imperil economic recovery as well as social and ecological protection – at a time when such protection is needed most.

If anything, the global economic turmoil has called into serious question the previously widely accepted role of deregulated and liberalised global financial and trade structures in reducing poverty: current evidence points to the opposite. Yet the international community appears not to have adequately absorbed these sobering lessons. Prevailing financial and trade paradigms are still driven, at core, by the pursuit of ever-higher growth rates and short-term returns at the expense of people's economic, social and cultural rights and the health of our increasingly fragile ecosystems. Mere economic growth, however, has already been shown to be an unsustainable, inefficient – and in some cases, ineffective – way of addressing the global poverty crisis.

Against this light, the WCC reiterates its calls for governments and international institutions – with the democratic participation of all peoples – to pursue economic policies as well as build economic frameworks that move away from the current paradigm that is focused on unlimited growth and based on structural greed towards models founded on pro-poor, redistributive

growth; universal provisioning of common social goods; sustainable consumption and production; and investments in small-holder agriculture (which continues to be the main source of livelihood for people and women in poverty), social reproduction and ecological protection.

Critical to lifting societies and people out of poverty is a much more equitable distribution of assets (capital, technology, land, education, health care, among others). A wealth of studies reveals that the lack of access by the poor (especially poor women) to assets necessary to achieve socio-economic security as well as higher productivity and income is a "fundamental constraint" on poverty eradication.

Emphasising the pivotal role of MDG 8 (global partnerships for development) in meeting the rest of the MDGs, governments and international institutions must seriously respond to widening inequalities among and within nations and the global financial and trade structures that propagate and deepen these inequalities. Much more attention ought to be placed on developing policies and structures that enable wealth-sharing among and within countries.
Poverty eradication is of course a critical goal in and by itself. At the same time, the WCC has long argued that many of the violent conflicts that continue to rage in different parts of our world stem in large part from the socio-economic deprivation experienced by communities. Thus, measures to eradicate poverty and close socio-economic gaps are important pathways to strengthening social cohesion and achieving lasting peace at local, national and global levels.
We believe that mobilising the financial resources needed for poverty eradication and the achievement of the MDGs – particularly through creative forms of taxation inasmuch as taxes are the only sustainable source of development finance – is a matter of political will, yes, and also of moral courage. At the onset of the global financial and economic crash, governments in rich countries were able to put together trillions of dollars in a matter of months to resuscitate ailing financial institutions; and global military spending continues to increase, amounting to U.S.$ 1464 billion in 2008 alone (SIPRI 2010). We need to re-examine and dismantle such a perverse system of priorities that places more import on rescuing big banks and acquiring machines that kill people than on emancipating people from starvation and homelessness. Clearly, the often put forward excuse of a dearth of financial resources to overcome poverty is instead more indicative of a dearth of life-affirming values and morals – a dearth of justice, solidarity and care.

What the international community can and must do in 1660 days
Reshaping the unjust financial and trade structures that generate and reinforce poverty and inequality is a long-term undertaking requiring coordinated action and meaningful cooperation among and between governments and international developmental institutions, as recognized by MDG 8, beyond 2015. Yet this does not preclude the international community from taking immediate measures and initial steps towards deep-seated transformations. Therefore, the WCC calls on governments and international institutions to commit to the following actions at the MDG Summit in September 2010:

- Enact urgent financial reforms and support further high-level discussions with substantial civil society participation under the auspices of the Financing for Development Process to build an international financial architecture that not only distributes socio-economic risks fairly but finances job-creating production, social reproduction and environmental sustainability; and in particular with a view to:

- Achieving stronger democratic oversight of international financial institutions, by making them subject to a UN Global Economic Council with the same status as the UN Security Council as proposed by the Stiglitz Commission;
- Creating and/or transforming financial regulatory institutions and mechanisms and implementing financial transaction taxes to deter speculation (whether on currency, food and other commodities) and capital flight;
- Supporting regional initiatives that decentralise finance and empower people in the global South to exercise control over their own development through bodies such as the Bank of the South, the Asian Monetary Fund and the Bank of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América;
- Strengthening tax systems by establishing an international accounting standard requiring country-by-country reporting of transnational companies' economic activities and taxes paid and forging a multilateral agreement to set a mandatory requirement for the automatic exchange of tax information between all jurisdictions to prevent tax avoidance;
- Establishing a new global reserve system based on a supranational global reserve currency and regional and local currencies;
- Setting up a new international credit agency with greater democratic governance than currently exists under the Bretton Woods institutions;
- Setting up an international bankruptcy court with the authority to cancel odious and other kinds of illegitimate debts and to arbitrate other debt issues;
- Regulating and reforming the credit agency industry into proper independent supervision institution(s), based on more transparency about ratings and strict regulation on the management of conflict of interest; and
- Using innovative sources of finance, including carbon and financial transaction taxes, to pay for global public goods and poverty eradication.
- Resume the Doha Round of trade talks and review free trade agreements based on the objective of transforming multilateral and bilateral trade and investment rules and agreements in support of realising the enshrined rights to food, water, health, education, and gainful and decent employment; and in particular to:
- Implement workable common international regulations to end agricultural import dumping; and
- Establish international commodity agreements setting stable base prices for products.
- Channel resources away from military spending and odious and illegitimate debt payments to investment areas with potentially strong anti-poverty impacts, particularly small-holder agriculture, social development and ecological sustainability; as well as ensure that development assistance to poor countries is not diminished in light of current pressures to rein in fiscal deficits.
- Discuss and adopt new and more balanced indicators that factor in social and ecological costs and benefits, and therefore better measure and monitor global socio-ecological-economic progress.

- **"Buddhist-Christian Common Word on Structural Greed" issued by participants at the end of a co-sponsored WCC-LWF meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 22-26 August 2010**

A joint statement

From 22 – 26 August 2010, thirty Buddhists from the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions and Christians from the Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions met at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, under the theme, "Buddhists and Christians Engaging Structural Greed Today." The consultation was jointly organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and hosted by the Institute of Religion, Culture and Peace at Payap University. Participants included activists, economists, religious leaders and scholars from Australia, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, UK and U.S.A.

The global financial crisis into which much of the world plunged in October 2008 has left large numbers of people around the world devastated, distraught and robbed of their human dignity. The WCC and LWF, who have a history of engaging questions of economic justice, recognize that the root causes of this crisis have not simply to do with economic realities but also with spirituality and morality. The Churches' Commission on International Affairs (CCIA) affirmed that Christianity alone does not have the resources effectively to address this crisis but must cooperate with other religions which, over centuries, have deeply reflected on the question of greed and have significant wisdom to offer.The LWF similarly has made the commitment to "engage with those of other faiths and with the rest of society in efforts to subvert greed and develop alternatives that are life-giving and sustaining for all."

We, Christians and Buddhists, therefore convened to seek a common word on the present crisis, recognizing that structural greed is at the core of the financial crisis. Recalling a saying of the Buddha, "in a situation of crisis, act as if your turban is on fire," we underscore the urgency of the situation. Recognizing also that the crisis has created an unprecedented opportunity to speak to the governments, financial institutions and to our own religious communities, we present the following observations that form our common word.

The present context

We, Buddhists and Christians, observe that one of the primary reasons for the global financial crisis is that over the past centuries economic processes have been progressively motivated and structured by the goal of maximizing profits for capital owners and thus monopolizing the world market. Following the great recession of 1929, political regulations to control this tendency were instituted. The dismantling of these regulations a few decades ago resulted in an environment for the unbridled explosion of personal and structural greed, leading to a debt and mortgage crisis, to unparalleled disparities between the super-rich and those who go hungry every day and to the accelerated degradation of the environment.

We, Buddhists and Christians, acknowledge that as individuals and religious communities we participate intentionally or unintentionally in seeking benefits from this system of personal and institutional greed and so have been complicit in its devastating effects. At the same time, we acknowledge our responsibility to learn about, resist and seek to change the system that destroys the lives of large numbers of mostly poor people in the world.

In recent decades, more people have become comfortable with greed and have begun to believe that unregulated greed is good and that unbridled competition and the accumulation of wealth are necessary for human progress. A steady diet of powerful messages communicated, for example, by corporate-controlled media has served to internalize these messages.

Financial markets that have been deregulated due to the pressures of structural greed have also led to a situation in which money and financial markets take on a life of their own, with the creation of an endless variety of new financial instruments for making quick, hyper profits. More than just a medium of exchange, money has become a commodity from which ever larger profits are promised and expected.

Buddhist and Christian understandings of greed

Buddhists understand greed as a human disposition, one of the three poisons of greed, hatred and delusion. Greed is a cause of suffering and an obstacle to enlightenment. On the path toward enlightenment, human beings can overcome the overwhelming power of the Three Poisons and thereby become generous, loving and compassionate persons.

Christians understand that they live in structures of domination and greed, traditionally related to the power of sin. Since the time of the prophets, biblical faith resisted these oppressive structures and worked for legal and community related alternatives. Following in this tradition, Jesus Christ lived a life in opposition to the forces of domination and died in fierce struggle against these. In his resurrection, Christians believe that he was victorious over these structures and empowers his followers, through the Holy Spirit, to resist and transform similar structures today.

To avoid addressing structural greed and to focus on individual greed is to maintain the *status quo*. As Buddhists and Christians, we are convinced that greed has to be understood both personally and structurally. Individual and structural greed feed each other in their interactive relation of cause and effect. They need each other for their sustenance and expansion.
Self-interest, necessary for human wellbeing, does not necessarily constitute greed. Insofar as humans can survive and flourish only together with one another, self-interest naturally includes the interests of others. Therefore, when self-interest is pursued without compassion for others, when interconnectedness is disregarded or when the mutuality of all humanity is forgotten, greed results. With greed, whether personal or structural, there can never be enough.

Strategies for engaging structural greed

Greed is manifested at both the individual and social levels, as well as structurally through political, economic and media power. Each level requires transformation and needs a variety of strategies to be effective.

Strategies for addressing greed at the personal and social levels include promoting generosity and cultivating compassion for others. We encourage effective preaching and teaching as well as spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer to motivate Buddhists and Christians towards personal and social transformation.

Counteracting the structural greed embodied in political and economic power structures requires different strategies. They include instituting anti-greed measures, such as the

development and enforcement of adequate regulation of financial transactions and policies that promote the equitable distribution of wealth.

Since market-driven global economies have become harmful to small businesses and devastating to local communities, efforts to create alternate economies at the local level must be encouraged. We identified four examples of such efforts from around the world: local exchange and trading system (LETS), in which trading is done in local and regional currencies; cooperative banking; decentralized energy; and localizing the production and exchange of basic commodities such as water and food.

As structural greed also threatens the earth's sustainability, we affirm the need to safeguard the "commons" for all people in participatory ways of organizing and managing the earth's resources.

These initiatives designed to transform structural greed cannot be instituted without strategic, well-organized activist communities. We recognize that some of the best initiatives for such organizing often come from the experience and creativity of those on the margins. We also note that preaching and teaching, both in temple and church, can be effective ways of motivating people to participate in such organized communities. Collective power is enhanced when Buddhists and Christians work together; they are able to have an even more effective and constructive impact when they engage with other religious communities and grassroots civil society organizations and movements.

As Buddhists and Christians, we also affirm that meditation, prayer and other spiritual practices offer people access to spiritual power that gives them perseverance, release from their egos, compassion with those who suffer and the inner strength to love and deal non-violently with those who they have to oppose. As Buddhist teachers have reminded us: we must be peace in order to make peace.

Conclusion

As Buddhists and Christians from a variety of traditions in our respective religions and from many countries, we spent four days struggling with the question of engaging structural greed. Each one of us strove to share authentically from the perspective of our tradition and identity. We tried to listen deeply to each other, suspend judgment, appreciate each other's beliefs, be self-critical of our own beliefs and attentive to new insights.

This common word testifies to the value of such a dialogue. Our hope is that such ongoing interreligious engagement and cooperation can be a powerful contribution to overcoming greed and realizing a world of greater compassion, wisdom and justice.

- **Letter from the WCC's general secretary to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations, on the occasion of the high-level UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals, 24 September 2010**

Your Excellency,
Dear Mr Secretary General,

In keeping with our faith priority for the marginalised and vision of communities experiencing life in fullness and dignity, the World Council of Churches (WCC) is keenly following the ongoing United Nations (UN) high-level summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) taking place in New York from 20 to 22 September 2010.

We take this opportunity to commend the UN for its leadership in articulating, monitoring and promoting the MDGs as well as improving a space for nation-states to participate and contribute in the critical discourse on surmounting poverty. At the same time, we pray that the MDG Review Summit will produce an action plan that seriously tackles the root causes of poverty and inequality, leading to the attainment of the MDGs by 2015.

Outside of emerging economies, progress on reducing poverty has been sluggish. Any gains have been eroded by the recent global economic crisis which continues to pummel the economies of developed and developing nations alike. In its wake is pervasive unemployment, massive indebtedness, intensified hunger and homelessness and enfeebled fiscal capacities to tackle these challenges.

The crisis has exposed the failure of deregulated and liberalized financial and trade structures in meeting the MDGs and alleviating poverty. Moreover, global and systemic characteristics of this crisis have brought into sharper focus the pivotal function of MDG 8, aimed at fostering a global partnership for development, in attaining the rest of the MDGs. Without significant transformations in global economic frameworks the attainment of the MDGs by 2015 is endangered.

In today's globalized world, efforts by nations to meet the MDGs are more and more contingent on an "enabling international economic environment". The WCC believes that addressing the roots cause of poverty and the attainment of the MDGs necessitate significant and comprehensive changes in the international financial architecture and trade regime. These changes ought to enable an equitable distribution of productive resources – capital, technology, land, education, and healthcare – within and among nations in as much as studies by UN agencies have concluded that the lack of access to assets by poor people (especially poor women) and poor nations presents a fundamental obstacle to the elimination of poverty.

The MDG Review Summit must also place importance on the reformulation of multilateral, regional and bilateral trade and investment rules and agreements. This must be based on the commitment to: give primacy to peoples' right to food, water, education, healthcare, gainful employment and the other necessities of life. Supporting small producers, advancing the interests of weak and vulnerable nations and strengthening responsibility for creation is core to the WCC call for the MDG (cf. Statement on "Just trade", WCC central committee, September 2006).

In pursuit of just trade, churches have specifically called for international regulations to end agricultural import dumping which has displaced and impoverished millions of small farmers. Just trade also means addressing declining terms of trade faced by developing countries by establishing international commodity agreements setting stable base prices for products.

The development of intellectual property guidelines that promote public health and bolster the fight against HIV-AIDS and other diseases by ensuring people's access to medicines, and that enable small producers to procure affordable seeds and technologies to foster ecologically-respectful agriculture and low-carbon industries is also crucial. During this MDG meeting and

on an ongoing basis the WCC is engaging itself with promoting among the MDGs, a global strategy for women's and children's health.

Insofar as nation-states have the responsibility for upholding peoples' economic, social and cultural rights, the MDG Review Summit must put in place binding mechanisms and accountability frameworks to ensure that commitments are met and the maximum of resources are made available for the MDGs.

Our hope is that the MDG Review Summit will seriously deliberate and facilitate justice-oriented reforms in the international financial and trade systems that are central to the achievement of the MDGs and the eradication of poverty.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Joint statement by the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Council of World Mission and the World Council of Churches, at the global ecumenical conference on a "New International Financial and Economic Architecture", São Paulo, Brazil, 5 October 2012**

Statement

From its inception the ecumenical movement has critically engaged with issues of economic and social justice. The current global economic crisis, which also affected rich economies in 2008 and has thrown millions of people across the globe into poverty, caught our special attention. In response, the World Council of Churches (WCC) addressed letters to the United Nations and the Group of 20, calling on governments to tackle systemic greed and inequality. In 2009, the WCC issued the statement on "Just finance and the economy of life" calling for an ethical, just and democratic international financial regime"grounded on a framework of common values: honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability and ecological sustainability." In 2009, as part of the commitment to live out the Accra Confession, the Uniting General Council Meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) called upon its members, in partnership with the WCC and other ecumenical bodies, to prepare an international ecumenical conference to propose a financial and economic architecture that:

- *is based on the principles of economic, social and climate justice;*
- *serves the real economy;*
- *accounts for social and environmental tasks; and*
- *sets clear limits to greed.*

Sharing a deep commitment to promoting justice in the economy and the Earth and recognising the need to work together to have a meaningful impact, the WCC, WCRC and Council for World Mission (CWM) convened the Global Ecumenical Conference on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture to engage diverse proponents, set criteria and framework and develop a plan of action towards constructing just, caring and sustainable global financial and economic structures.

We, economists, church leaders, activists, politicians and theologians gathered in Sao Paulo, Brazil between the 29th of September and the 5th of October 2012 to envision together an alternative global financial and economic architecture. The gathering was a response to and continuation of the decades of work around issues of economic, social and ecological justice with which the WCRC, WCC, CWM, and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have been involved. The visions and the criteria for a new financial and economic architecture and the alternatives that are expressed in this document therefore build on the "Accra Confession" of the WCRC,[1] the "Statement on just finance and the economy of life" and the "AGAPE Call" of the WCC[2]as well as the theological statement of Mission in the Context of Empire of the CWM.

The 2008 global financial and economic crash increased poverty and unemployment among millions in the global North and worsened and deepened poverty, hunger and malnutrition among even larger numbers in the global South, already experiencing decades of poverty and deprivation caused by injustices in international financial and economic relations. A system of speculation, competition and inadequate regulations has failed to serve the people but instead has denied a decent standard of life to the majority of the world's population. The situation is urgent!

Critical theological reflection on the material and collective bases of life has been intrinsic to the call to be faithful Disciples of Christ and has expressed itself through theological contemplative praxis that has sought transformative liberation from unjust sociopolitical, cultural and economic structures, therefore promoting the fullness of life for all creation.

Modernity has however, brought with it an economic model based on profit and self-interest disconnected from faith and ethics. This has led to the ideological justification of colonialism, the despair of poverty and inequality, and the violence of economic and ecological devastation as well as the reluctance of some churches to discern the signs of the times and engage with the realities of a dehumanizing dominant world order that perpetually discriminates and oppresses those with whom God sides, the poor, the downtrodden, the disadvantaged and the oppressed.
The immersion visits in Sao Paulo exposed the narratives of the homeless, the single mother, the widow, the orphan, the addict, just some of the disenfranchised, a visible encounter with those of whom society has left on the periphery. Patriarchal perceptions, racist subjugative ideologies, anthropocentric domination and discriminative comprehensions of the human hierarchal order induced by the sin of neoliberalism, supported by heretical theology which justifies it and legitimized by the idolatry of imperial globalization have perverted relationships between God, humans and the Earth.

The God of the oppressed calls us into an alternative imagination which has to emerge from the margins, from those who have been left out of sociopolitical and economic decision-making but are the first to suffer its consequences.

[1] See http://www.wcrc.ch/sites/default/files/Accra%20Conf%20ENG_0.pdf
[2] See http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2009/reports-and-documents/report-on-public-issues/statement-on-just-finance-and-the-economy-of-life.html and http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/agape-call-for-action-2012.html.

We therefore seek a transformative theological praxis which not only delegitimizes, displaces and dismantles the present social and economic order but also envisions alternatives which emerge from the margins. There is therefore a requirement for an active radicalizing of our theological discourse that no longer allows for too much power to be placed into capitalist ideologies that has resulted in an inability of thinking beyond existing financial and economic structures.

This alternative imagination has to be derived from our spiritual and theological convictions. Therefore employing liberative theologies that respond to concrete systematic struggles, inclusive of feminist, womanist, mujerista, eco-feminist, Latin American liberation, black, ecological, post-colonial, grassroots, minority and public theology and indigenous spiritualities. The list of hermeneutical lenses of suspicion and retrieval required to bring about transformative change goes on to be as extensive as the list of those who have been downtrodden and persecuted by the dominant economic world order.

We lament the manner in which economic and financial legislation and controls are biased in favour of the wealthy. We therefore affirm the God of justice for all the oppressed (Ps 103:6). We call for a system of just legislation and controls which would facilitate redistribution Therefore we reject Empire[3]and our complicity with all systems of death, inclusive of militarism, and affirm movements of social concern and other radical traditions that are a rejection of Empire and seek to build life in community outside of the logic of hierarchy and discrimination.

We reject political and military offences in the name of neoliberalism that threaten human security and result in massive violations of human rights.

Therefore we reject the explosion of monetization and the commodification of all of life and affirm a theology of grace which resists the neoliberal urge to reduce all of life to an exchange value (Rom 3:24). Means have become ends, instruments have become the coercion of facts.
We reject an economy that is driven by debt and financialization in favour of an economy of for-giveness, caring and justice and declare that debt and speculation have reached their limits. We affirm the words of the Lord's Prayer in which we pray to have our own debt forgiven in the same manner as we forgive the debts of others (Matt. 6:12).

Therefore we reject the ideology of consumerism and affirm an economy of Manna which provides sufficiently for all and negates the idea of greed (Ex. 16).

We reject increasing individualistic consumerism by affirming and celebrating diversity and interconnectedness of life. We further affirm that wholeness of life can only be achieved through the interdependent relationships with the whole of the created order. The idea of a Triune God acts as a challenge to individualism, discrimination and exclusivity; it is a doctrine which calls us into life of equality in community and requires an active response that affects the whole of humanity.

We therefore exclude notions of exclusivity based on the morality of the diversity of the cosmos by promoting and affirming the need for interfaith dialogue. A praxis of connectivity enabling a wider dissemination of spiritual resources gathered from faith communities, inclusive of the Qur'an's insistence on the rejection of interest, the valorisation of moral

[3] "In using the term 'empire' we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests" (Accra Confession).

banking and concentration on the real economy, as well as the Islamic injunction on limits to consumption which is expressed through the idea of Ramadan and fasting, which resonates with how many Christians around the world practice lent.

We reject an economy of overconsumption and greed, recognising how neoliberal capitalism conditions us psychologically to desire more and more, and affirm instead Christian and Buddhist concepts of an economy of sufficiency which promotes restraint (Lk 12:13-21), highlighting for example the Sabbath economy of rest for people and creation and the Jubilee economy of redistribution of wealth.

We reject the economic abstraction of Homo Oeconomicus that constructs the human person as being essentially insatiable and selfish and affirm that the Christian perception of the human person is embedded in community relationships of Ubuntu[4], Sansaeng, Sumak Kawsay[5]conviviality and mutuality. Contrary to the logic of neoliberals, as believers we are called to think not only of our own interests but also of the interests of others (Phil 2:4).

We acknowledge our role in the destruction of the Earth's resources and the impact this has had on the vulnerable nations in the south and we continue to seek forgiveness through practical actions and solutions mitigating against ecological destruction.

We affirm ourselves as prophetic witnesses, as we have seen the injustices and structural violence of our age and those of a history of domination. We have discerned the signs of the times in the light of our calling as disciples of Jesus. Therefore we seek to overcome capitalism, its nature and its logic and establish a system of global solidarity. We search for alternatives, for just, caring, participatory and sustainable economies such as a solidarity economy and gift economy.

We affirm that the only choice that Jesus offers us is between God and Mammon (Matt. 6:24), as those who desire to be faithful followers; we have no choice but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly (Mic. 6:8).

Therefore we present the following criteria and framework.

Criteria and framework

We are called to find a new and just international financial architecture oriented towards satisfying the needs of people, realising all economic, social and cultural rights and human dignity. Such architecture must be focused on reducing the intolerable chasm between the rich and the poor and preventing ecological destruction. This requires a system that does not serve greed but which embraces alternative economies which foster a spirituality of enough and a lifestyle of simplicity, solidarity, social inclusion and justice.

Overcoming greed

The drive to consume is a culture of greed that destroys all of God's creation. The economic activity of the last five centuries has caused massive ecological destruction. Over the years, big businesses, governments and multinational corporations have been reckless through policies and practices of unlimited growth which have led to pollution, destruction of forests, overproduction and alienation of the poor and farm workers from the land. Natural resources

[4] Ubuntu is an African concept of personhood in which the identity of the self is understood to be formed interdependently through community" (Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me*).
[5]Sumakkawsay in Quichua is the notion of "good living" or "good life."

are limited, and the human ecological footprint already surpasses the Earth's bio-capacity. Individual self-interest and long-term social welfare are not necessarily compatible, and market mechanisms do not lead to an optimal social distribution. Therefore, political regulation is required in order to optimise sustainable social welfare.

Social inclusion
There is a distorted definition of anthropology in neoliberalism in which Human beings are defined by financial and economic value and not by their intrinsic dignity as persons created in the image of God. This anthropology has nested in humanity, colonizing our mind and our dreams. This definition leads to racism, sexism and other forms of categorization, exclusion and oppressive behaviour. This is a sin against God, humanity and all creation.

Gender justice and ecological justice
We need an economy that recognizes the link between gender justice and ecological justice. The degradation of the land and Earth has dire consequences upon the lives of the marginalised, especially the poor, the women and children in poor countries. Land is tied closely to women both physically and symbolically. Physically, women till the land and walk miles for water for their families. Symbolically, the sufferings of the land are likened to the pains and groans of a woman at childbirth (Romans 8:22). To put it differently, the 'economy of care' for the Earth cannot be separated from the issue of justice for all of God's creation.

Hope
We are committed to affirming existing alternatives to neoliberal capitalism. Persons living in poverty, deprived by neoliberal financial systems, have demonstrated that alternative life-giving economies are alive, impacting millions of indigenous and grassroots people. It is to these initiatives that we must turn to for a criterion that truly speaks to an alternative. Throughout the world people's movements resist the temptation to surrender to a death-dealing economic system. At the same time, many poor and marginalised survive through a variety of systems which, even though not recognized by big business, governments and mainstream economies nevertheless keep them alive and hopeful.

Spirituality and economy
There is need to democratize and demystify economic knowledge and free public imagination to promote social and personal wellbeing on a foundation of economic justice. There are Biblical, Qu'aranic and indigenous narratives that point us to economic life-giving systems where there is equitable sharing, communion with creation, abundance for all and affirmation for the fruits of our labour as offerings for the common good. Biblical motifs such as Jubilee, Shalom, Eucharist, *oikos*, and *Koinonia* remind us of God in community with God's creation as well as the covenantal relationship into which God invites us (cf. Ex. 16:16-21).

The dire crises which confront us imply that that our long term vision has to be met with short and middle term goals, therefore we recommend the following.

An ecumenical plan of action and landmarks of a new international financial and economic architecture
The world economy and the international financial system have globalised but democratic governments have not followed suit in any appropriate way. The key democratic problem is the lack of sovereignty over our lives, the planet and the future. Markets rule. As a result, we

see a patchwork of governing systems with overlapping and often competing competencies. Some of these suffer from a serious deficit of justice and lack of democratic credentials. The Group of 20 constitutes a case in point. As a group of self-appointed world leaders, they discuss and decide on issues that affect far more people than live in their own countries. By the same token, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) are not based on a democratic system. Rather, their decision-making structures reflect the relative economic and financial power of nation states.

In order to address these inequalities, nothing less than a drastic overhaul is necessary of the governance of the world economy and the international financial system. The major objective is to ensure that financial markets and the economy are brought under the primacy of democratic decision-making structures and that they function as good servants rather than bad masters in political-economic life. Economics has to be embedded in social, ecological and political life rather than the other way around.

This plan identifies policies to address the fundamental issues mentioned above, which can be distinguished into immediate and medium term actions, and longer term structural changes of the global economic and financial architecture. Furthermore, a number of strategies for the churches are suggested and signs of hope are recalled.

Immediate and medium-term actions

Alternative indicators of economic wellbeing

Governments and international institutions should replace Gross Domestic Product growth as the primary indicator of economic progress by other indicators, including growth of decent work, indicators of quality as well as quantity of health and education, and measures of environmental sustainability.

Regulating the financial sector

A number of measures are necessary to regulate and transform the financial sector:

- A comprehensive equivalent regulation of the entire financial sector, including the lightly regulated shadow banking sector (which in the U.S. and Europe is larger than the banking sector) is required.
- There is a need to ensure that banks have adequate capital to absorb losses. Regulations on permitted leverage and minimum liquidity must be rigorous. Likewise counter-cyclical prudential regulation can assist in macroeconomic management.
- Basic banking activities of deposit-taking and lending to enterprises and households should be tightly regulated and separated from more risky activity (as was done in the U.S. in the 1930s with the Glass-Steagall Act).
- Banks that are “too big to fail” should be broken up.
- Speculative activity should be restricted so that the counterpart to real-economy hedging needs is met without overwhelming enterprise on a “sea of speculation.” Regulators should set “position limits” on commodity traders in all globally relevant markets especially food stuffs and products to limit unnecessary price volatility. Regulators should also require that market participants are capable of accepting delivery of the actual commodities. Further Credit Default Swaps, which have played a harmful role in the recent financial crisis, should be banned.
- Public policy should be directed at the reform of bankers’ remuneration systems, to link them to long term social and environmental performance rather than short-term

results. For example, bonuses could be set at a maximum of 100% of fixed remuneration (as demanded by the European Parliament). Commissions should be forbidden when selling financial products to retail investors.

Financial Transaction Tax
A global Financial Transactions Tax on trades in equities, bonds, currencies, and derivatives should immediately be established. Likewise a democratically representative agency to receive and allocate the proceeds for global public goods, including the eradication of poverty and disease and the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation incurred by low-income countries, must also be set into place.

Ensuring access of poor and marginalized sectors to basic financial services
In line with the principle that finance should be a valuable public service, financial services such as savings accounts and credit must be made available on acceptable terms to small and medium enterprises, people in poverty, women and farmers. The setting up of credit unions should be encouraged to provide productive loans to sectors of society that are not deemed credit-worthy by the mainstream banking industry often on account of poverty, class, gender and race.

Investment and sustainable development policies
Governments have a role in supporting long-term, socially useful investment through strong investment programmes for renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and energy efficiency. Governments should also set binding emission caps for greenhouse gases; binding product norms (e.g., moving caps for energy efficiency for buildings, etc.); support sustainable investment banks and social finance institutions; and make green technology available to the South.

Progressive taxation
Capital gains must be taxed the same as other income. Likewise income taxes should be made much more progressive, especially for the highest income earners. Revenues from wealth taxes and estate taxes should be used for public purposes.

Gender-just fiscal stimulus and social protection
Public investment and spending on small-scale agriculture, renewable energy, infrastructure, health and education sectors, and gender-just social protection programmes must be safeguarded and expanded even during periods of painful austerity measures in debt-burdened nations. Austerity often falls heavily on the most vulnerable sectors of society and results in a vicious cycle of economic decline, hampering recovery by dampening domestic demand and eroding national tax revenues.

Addressing tax evasion and avoidance
A multinational framework for the compulsory exchange of tax information on individual and corporate accounts that will effectively end the use of tax havens must be established. Transnational corporations should be required to report sales, profits and taxes paid on a country by country basis in their audited financial reports.

Ecological taxations
Ecologically destructive industries and activities must be heavily taxed or prohibited. Further fossil fuel extraction and carbon emissions should be taxed while at the same time rebating some of the proceeds to low-income households and using other revenues for investments in

energy efficiency, conservation and renewable energy to assist in the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Regulating financial flows for sustainability
Governments should be encouraged to manage capital flows so that surges of flows in or out of a country do not destabilise the economy, including through instruments such as capital controls. Capital controls could curb the entry of volatile short-term flows as well as prevent capital flight from already beleaguered economies.

Sovereign debt restructuring mechanism
A comprehensive, fair and transparent international debt restructuring mechanism, to address sovereign insolvency on a timely basis should be established. Such a mechanism must be empowered to audit sovereign debts and cancel those debts found to be odious because they were contracted by despotic regimes without public consent for use against the population or are illegitimate due to other factors such as usurious interest charges, fraud, and repayment obligations that would cause unacceptable privation.

Information and communication architecture
Information and communication structures that support alternative financial and economic structures must be promoted.

Structural changes
United Nations Economic Social Ecological Security Council
With all its deficiencies, the UN remains the most representative and inclusive forum for global cooperation and policy setting. Conceptually, it serves as a model on which to build a more effective and representative international financial and economic architecture. And yet it is not adequately forging consensus on many issues at this time.

A potential instrument for enhanced, effective and coherent global governance could be the establishment of a UN Economic, Social and Ecological Security Council (UNESESC). Civil society and churches have repeatedly called for such a body where pressing economic, social and ecological issues would be brought together to be discussed and acted upon in a coherent way. The report of the Stiglitz Commission, published in 2009, echoed this demand.[6]As proposed by the Stiglitz Commission, the task of the UNESESC would be to assess developments and provide leadership in addressing economic issues that require global action while taking into account social and ecological factors. It should represent all regions of the world at the highest possible level and ensure the participation of the various global institutions (such as the IFIs, International Labour Organization, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, World Health Organization, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Telecommunication Union, etc.) and cooperate closely with civil society to promulgate protection of the economic, social and ecological rights of nations and communities.

A church-led initiative should bring together relevant interested stakeholders to help further develop the proposal in order to overcome differences that impede reaching the consensus needed for implementation. In addition and as an interim measure, an informal

[6]Stiglitz Commission (2008): "Report of the Commission of Experts of the President of the United Nations General Assembly on Reform of the International Monetary and Financial System", New York, United Nations.

intergovernmental forum at the UN could bring together representatives of governments, multilateral institutions, private sector and civil society organizations in order to build consensus on financial policy and governance reforms that serve society.

A new International Monetary Organization to replace the International Monetary Fund

A new International Monetary Organization (IMO) needs to be created and should be guided by universal principles of economic, social and ecological justice. The IMO would have oversight over monetary policies and transactions and would deploy funds without structural adjustment conditions in order to firmly establish a globally effective, stable, fair and socially responsible global financial and economic architecture, bringing democratic accountability to financial markets. Its actions should not be dominated by policies of interest groups and its policies should be equitable and responsive to the social consequences of financial activities at financial sector and national levels.

The proposed IMO should orientate its policies towards economies in the service of life. Its policies should cover areas such as capital flows, control of capital flight, taxes on capital flows, and, where and when appropriate, (re)establishing fixed currency exchange rates. Such policies would enable countries to regain autonomy of fiscal and monetary policy. Furthermore, the IMO should deal with limiting excessive speculation, fair burden-sharing of private creditors in dealing with the impacts of financial crises, increased cooperation in financial market controls, guidelines for risk management, closing tax havens, etc.

An alternative international reserve currency

There is a need to design a new multi-currency reserve asset, similar to Special Drawing Rights, to create liquidity so that the "seigniorage" currently enjoyed by those countries whose currencies are now used as reserves instead accrues to the international community. At present, the main commonly used international reserve currency is the U.S. dollar. Almost everywhere in the world, the U.S. dollar is accepted and convertible. This creates enormous advantages for the U.S. economy as, contrary to other countries, the U.S. can pay for some of its imports with dollars instead of with exports, as long as the world considers the dollar a safe reserve currency. No other country in the world would survive with the level of current account deficits as high and as persistent as those of the U.S. This "seigniorage" is an "exorbitant privilege" which accrues to the U.S. It is a major unjust feature of the present international financial system, coupled with the fact that there are often undesirable consequences for the world's economies, such as excessive capital flows, of the monetary policies that the U.S. takes for purely domestic reasons.

In order to make the world less dependent on U.S. deficits (or gold reserves, for that matter) and in order to create global liquidity in a more rational way, the International Monetary Fund created, in the 1960s, a multilateral reserve asset called Special Drawing Rights. SDRs can be created as the objective need arises, e.g. as an instrument for anti-cyclical policies (as in 2009), and as an alternative reserve asset which could eventually replace the U.S. dollar and a few other reserve currencies. Besides SDRs, other proposals have been made such as International Currency Certificates. The common aim of these proposals is to search for ways and means to arrive at a system for the creation of liquidity based on global need in order to serve the real economy.

Strategies and actions for churches

To move forward the agenda outlined above, a global ecumenically instituted commission should be immediately formed to carry forward the valuable work of the Stiglitz Commission, linking with other faith communities, civil society organizations, interested governments, institutions and other relevant stakeholders to develop a concrete proposal for the governance of a new world economic and financial churches architecture.
Further the following actions are recommended:

- The WCC, WCRC, CWM and LWF should, together with other partners, develop a coherent strategy of advocacy for a new economic and financial architecture. Effective communication strategies are key for successful advocacy initiatives.
- Churches should substantially increase the number of staff working on building dialogue with decision-makers in the fields of politics, the private sector, professional associations, standard setting institutions, research organizations and civil society organizations regarding economic and financial developments.
- An ecumenical school of governance, economics and management (GEM) should be established to develop economic competencies and empowerment within the ecumenical movement. In addition, educational materials should be developed with the aim to enhance economic and financial literacy of church members.
- Churches should affirm a commitment to communication rights to advance the empowerment of communities in developing alternatives to the current financial and economic structures.
- The ecumenical movement should accompany alternative social movements from below that protest against the injustices of the present system and strive to set up alternatives (e.g., the World Social Forum and, more recently, the “Occupy” movement).
- As a matter of accountability, churches should be asked to report on how they have followed up on recommendations on ethical investments. Such responses could be used to strengthen ecumenical cooperation in this area.

Signs of hope
The agenda for transformation is vast and it is easy to be overwhelmed by all that is required to implement it. Yet numerous alternatives have already been established by people all over the world that serve as signposts of change:

- Organizations and people are making a distinction between material wealth and wellbeing and are advocating that limits be observed for those who are already well off. In this context, efforts are made to develop new indicators, in addition to or in lieu of GDP growth such as the Human Development Index. The major world religions are well placed to contribute to these initiatives as they are inspired by notions like the “life in all its fullness.”
- Initiatives are being taken to promote education and financial literacy and to coach those who need accompaniment in dealing with money and finance.
- The different forms of provision of care services (unpaid, paid public and paid private) are being considered as key indicators as important as financial balances and production of tradable goods and services. Policies ought to be based on these in order

to enhance recognition of the vital role that women play in economic life, and to further promote this role.

- Other concrete examples are Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) which create their own local economies, the setting up of credit unions, the use of ethical investments, and organizations like Oikocredit and ECLOF, which are micro finance organizations established by the WCC and partners.
- Latin American integration and independence is advancing though political organizations such as the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), Union of South America Nations (UNASUR) and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and economic cooperation through MERCOSUR (a regional trade agreement), SUCRE (a regional currency), Banco del Sur and the proposed Fondo del Sur.

In view of the gross injustices that accompany neoliberal policies and structures, nothing less is necessary than a metanoia of the international economic and financial system. For that we need a people's movement which, like the earlier civil rights, anti-apartheid and Jubilee movements, rejects a world which is so unfair, unequal and unjust, and that is run for the benefit of the "1%."

Ultimately, changes will have to go beyond technical and structural requirements; what the world needs is a change of heart so that financial and economic systems will not have individual gain as their compass but justice, peace and the protection of God's creation.

Climate change

- **Minute on UNFCCC Conference of Parties – COP 15 in Copenhagen adopted by the WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010**

The WCC is disappointed with the outcome of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP 15) held in Copenhagen from 7 to 18 December 2009 as the Copenhagen Accord did not reach the expectations of the ecumenical movement and the larger civil society.

The COP-15 was seen as a significant opportunity to reach an agreement after the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) which will end in 2012. The Kyoto Protocol, the binding instrument that applies to the UNFCCC, had agreed on targets for this period. The meeting in Copenhagen was expected to reach an agreement on what would comprise the commitments of the industrialized countries and economies in transition that are considered as Annex I parties of the Kyoto Protocol, those who are compelled to reduce their emissions.

The mobilization of the ecumenical movement towards and in Copenhagen was aimed at supporting widespread initiatives in order to reach a fair, ambitious and binding treaty. This should have included the recognition of the historic responsibility for the CO2 emissions of industrialized countries, a measurable commitment to have a maximum of 350 ppm of CO2 in the atmosphere, concrete ways of adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and funding in a legally binding instrument which would have framed the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

A strong collaboration between the WCC and various ecumenical actors, with the support of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, the National Council of Churches in Denmark and Dan Church Aid helped to facilitate coordination and ecumenical participation. The ecumenical "Countdown to Copenhagen" campaign collected more than half a million signatures. The bell-ringing and prayer campaign on 13 December 2009 mobilized more than two thousand congregations, parishes, chapels and various other groups in all regions. Church leaders present in Copenhagen clearly conveyed the message to the negotiators: "Do not be afraid to make the decisions that must be made for all of humanity and for the future of creation. Do not be afraid to act for justice and for love. Do not be afraid to make a fair, ambitious and legally-binding agreement. Do not be afraid: act now!" Despite this and many other calls, the Copenhagen Accord, negotiated primarily by five countries and then opened for signatures, did not meet the desired expectations. After the deadline for the communication of voluntary reductions, the accord is still contested by many.

The World Council of Churches deeply regrets that a lack of political will from major players in COP 15 prevented achievement of a deal which would effectively respond to the climate change challenge. The moral obligations of the states to adopt a clear position regarding adaptation, mitigation and technology transfer failed to prevail as individual state interests became prominent.

The World Council of Churches has been addressing climate change-related challenges since 1988 which has facilitated the recognition of various dimensions related to environmental, political, social, economic and cultural aspects of climate change as well as addressing the justice component. Those who suffer most due to the impact of climate change are impoverished and vulnerable communities who contribute only minimally to global warming. Climate justice requires the implementation of effective adaptation and mitigation measures as well as technology transfer in order to reduce the consequences of climate change. At the same time, climate change is considered within the broader perspective of caring for creation, which is grounded in the biblical call. The policy of the WCC on climate change has been expressed on several occasions and recently in the statement on the tenth anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol (executive committee, September 2007), the minute on global warming and climate change (central committee, February 2008) and the statement on ecological debt and eco-justice (central committee, September 2009).

In light of these considerations, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010:

A. ***Reiterates***the serious concerns expressed by the churches over climate change and its life-threatening effects, especially on the poor and vulnerable communities in many parts of the world, such as the low-lying islands of the Pacific or the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region;

B. ***Appreciates*** the wide ecumenical participation in the process towards and in COP 15 in Copenhagen with ecumenical activities such as the ecumenical celebration, the handing over of signatures, lobbying, side events and the statement presented at the high-level segment.

C. ***Affirms***the basic thrust of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol to provide an instrument for a significant reduction of greenhouse gases in order to mitigate human-induced climate change;

D. ***Calls*** for renewed efforts with its member churches to call on their respective governments to ensure with urgency a fair, ambitious and binding agreement to be reached as a result of the COP 16 that will take place in Mexico in December 2010;

E. ***Encourages*** member churches, specialized ministries and other ecumenical partners to strengthen further their commitment and to foster their cooperation with regard to climate change, especially in the process towards and at COP 16 in Mexico;

F. ***Urges***member churches and ecumenical councils to enhance interreligious cooperation and constructive intervention, ensuring better stewardship of creation through their joint actions.

- **Letter from WCC to Rev. Dr Joel C. Hunter of the Northland Church in Florida, U.S.A., welcoming the "Blessed Earth Initiative", 22 April 2010**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Warm greetings from the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of 349 churches in more than 100 countries throughout the world!

We welcome the "Blessed Earth" initiative "Hope for Creation: international simulcast" that was held to commemorate the Earth Day, as a concrete Christian response to care for creation and to protect the most vulnerable communities in different parts of the world.

Climate change has become one of the major challenges of our days. It is already affecting poor communities in different regions and will affect more and more in the coming years.The celebration of Earth Day, today, is indeed an occasion to express our response to the biblical imperative of taking care of the garden created by God (Gen 2:15) and at the same time to act justly and to protect the most vulnerable, "the widow, the orphan and the stranger" in the prophets' literature (cf. Is 1:17); and the poor who are called blessed by Jesus in the Beatitudes (Lk 6:20).

Churches have a crucial role to play in witnessing to our shared responsibility for creation and eco-justice, in calling Christians in congregations and parishes to express their commitment through individual and family lifestyles and in equipping churches for advocacy that is rooted in faith.

The "Countdown to Copenhagen" and the "Bellringing35o" campaigns in 2009 were ecumenical initiatives that showed how much Christians and churches around the world care about climate change. More than a half million signatures were collected and more than 2,500 congregations rant their bells and organized prayer vigils.

We see the Hope for Creation Simulcast as another initiative contributing to the relevant witness of Christian Churches in this domain.
Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Martin Robra, director,
Programme on the WCC and the Ecumenical Movement in the 21St Century

Dr Rogate Mshana, director,
Programme on Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation

- **Joint ecumenical declaration co-presented by the WCC at the "World people's conference on climate change and the rights of Mother Earth", 22 April 2010**

Listening to the cry of Mother Earth

Towards a new spirituality of respectful co-existence
The signatory bodies below, in a meeting held at the *World Conference of Peoples on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*, having engaged in deep reflection on the role of religions and spiritualities in legitimizing systems leading to the collapse of our planet, while at the same time recognizing its vital force, express our deep concern on climate change and its effects, which are an attack on life, especially that of the poorest and most vulnerable people in many parts of the Earth. Mother Earth and the whole Creation is groaning and is in pains of childbirth and requires a new holistic and ecological spirituality in order to preserve life.

We thus declare:
1. The cry of Mother Earth, the sustainer of all life forms, is reaching the ears of all people of good will. The desire to increase wealth, the comfort of a luxurious life style, consumerism, indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources and pollution of air, water and soil have brought our planet Earth to the edge of climate breakdown.

2. Climate change is the result of a human mentality that regards Nature as an object to be dominated, exploited and manipulated, and humankind as its master and sole measure.

3. We acknowledge that a certain interpretation of the Jewish-Christian tradition has contributed in history to encouraging this type of anthropocentrism and the merciless exploitation of Nature, by wrongly interpreting the responsibility to be the carer and advocate of Creation. Every religious system needs critically to revise its role as regards climate change.

4. We call, together with Indigenous Peoples and their wisdom, for a deep conversion of the ruling paradigm and of oppressive structures, as well as our mentality, attitudes and way of life, so as to bring our lives into harmony with Nature, the cosmos and the great mystery of life.

5. We believe that the religions and spiritualities of peoples, in mutual dialogue, can guide us in our search for a life in harmony with the environment, future generations and the cosmos. We thus call on church and religious leaders to make every effort to engage in a wide campaign of awareness-raising and conversion of all believers, in order to contribute to safeguarding life on our planet Earth. We also call on them to make representations to their governments and international bodies such as the United Nations in order that countries commit themselves to take on greater responsibility in caring for the earth.

6. We ask political, economic and scientific leaders to take urgent measures to respond effectively to the effects of climate change and secure the foundations for abundant life for all, especially for the poorest and for future generations. We trust that the coming United Nations Summit on Climate Change, COP 16, to take place in Mexico in December 2010, will prove to be a key event for the future of humankind.

7. We commit ourselves to implementing in our organizations, religious institutions and personal lives an eco-centric spirituality, and to take awareness-raising measures to change people's mentality and patterns of consumption.

Associating ourselves with the 'Agreement of the Peoples', we invoke the life-giving Spirit to guide and strengthen us in our commitment to future generations, to Mother Earth, and to the whole Creation.

Cochabamba, 22 April 2010 (Mother Earth Day)

Signatories:
Higher Andean Ecumenical Institute of Theology, ISEAT
Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, EATWOT
World Council of Churches, WCC
Latin American Council of Churches, CLAI
Religious communities living among the people, CRIMPO
Semilla
Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia
Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church
Mission 21
Amerindia

- ## Report issued at the conclusion of a conference to put the rights of "climate refugees" on the agenda of the international community, 3-4 May 2010

Protection and reparations for "climate refugees": imperatives and options
Among the many concerns raised by the phenomenon of climate change, the likelihood of mass population displacement is among the most pressing and worrisome. For small island states such as Tuvalu, the reality of land loss is already apparent. As to the broader phenomenon of climate-related migration, even conservative figures are daunting. However, there has been relatively little substantive discussion of this crucial issue at international level, and there is as yet no clear international policy direction for addressing a problem of potentially immense magnitude.

There are a number of reasons for the relative lack of movement on this crucial topic. First, there are no solid estimates of the numbers of likely migrants or refugees, and little certainty about where will be affected or where they are likely to go. Available estimates range from hundreds of millions (according to the Stern Review) to a billion (Christian Aid). But all such estimates involve making choices about relevant timescales and climate scenarios, and also predictions of the likelihood of credible mitigation and adaptation action. This is a second reason for the tardy appreciation of this problem: mass migration, were it to happen, will signal the effective failure of policies to deal with climate change – mitigation efforts will have failed, and adaptive funding or activities will have failed to materialize, leaving migration as the adaptation policy of last resort. To begin to take mass migration seriously, for these reasons, may appear pessimistic or defeatist – but more to the point, such a discussion risks taking place in a relative vacuum. What is, in fact, the likely scenario for population displacement? The answer at present is: we barely know.

For similar reasons, third, climate change refugees are likely to prove extremely contentious in political negotiation. It may seem wiser to states not to engage with the issue as long as they are still grappling with so many other difficult sticking points, with these others at least known and, to a degree, quantifiable. Fourth, the bodies that might naturally be expected to think ahead on this issue – UNHCR and IOM – have signally failed to take the issue seriously, at least in public. These bodies deny the legitimacy of the term "climate refugees" but have not put forward a credible alternative; they have dampened expectations of compensation for those needing to flee their homes even in advance of concrete cases appearing; they appear more comfortable referring to climate migration as largely concerning internally displaced persons (IDPs), thus obscuring the likelihood of cross-border migration. In general, they have failed to show leadership on a topic where they would appear the natural experts.

And yet it is vital to begin to think through the policy implications of climate migration and climate refugees. As mentioned, some small island states are already preparing for the likelihood of the disappearance of their territories, and are negotiating deals with other countries to take on their populations. Those conversations are necessarily precarious and the international community as a whole should be paying attention, as precedents set today are likely to be of great importance in future. The islands in question are generally inhabited by relatively small populations, but in some parts of the world, large-scale population moves are foreseeable. Bangladesh, for example, could lose 20 percent of its landmass if sea levels rise by 1m (as predicted by the IPCC for the end of the century). In such a scenario, up to 20 million people may lose their homes and need to move. What will happen? Again, the answer, at present, is: we barely know.

With this in view, Bread for the World, the Pacific Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches organized a Conference on "Protection and reparation for climate refugees" on May 4-5, 2010 in Chavannes-de-Bogis near Geneva. The goal of the meeting was to stimulate discussion between academia, civil society, governments, intergovernmental institutions and churches on the phenomenon of climate displaced people, and to inventory the challenges and possibilities for responding. The conference explored the concepts of "climate refugees" and "compensation" as well as best practices and lessons learned from actions seeking to address the problem on national, regional and global levels.

In a first session, Prof. Frank Biermann presented his proposal for a sui generis regime for climate refugees under the UNFCCC, with comments from Ms Margit Ammer of the Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights and Mr Peter Emberson of the Pacific Conference of Churches. Three country case studies followed, focusing on Bangladesh, Mozambique and Papua New Guinea. The remainder of the conference was taken up by three panels, discussing legal, humanitarian and political challenges respectively. These involved debates between representatives of the ACT Alliance, the United Nations University, Bread for the World, the World Council of Churches, the German Forum for Human Rights, Prodipan of Bangladesh and a member of the Bangladeshi parliament, the London School of Economics, the Mozambique Mission to the UN and global and regional church alliances.

Rather than providing a chronological account of these discussions, this report rather gleans and summarizes common themes under the below headings:

1. Terminology
2. A climate refugee regime (new or amended).
3. Collective and individual rights

4. States' obligations (national and extraterritorial)
5. Best practices/lessons learned (participation, transparency, ownership)
6. Suggested strategies for further action (local, national, international levels) Conclusion

1. Terminology

The 1951 Refugee Convention (United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees), as amended by a 1967 Protocol, defines a refugee as follows:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

The definition restricts coverage to those persecuted for their beliefs or their belonging to a particular group. It does not, as it stands, appear to cover "climate refugees" because it is difficult to consider climate change as targeted persecution in the ordinary sense, even though it has a human origin. Although victims may suffer due to their lack of resources, poverty or other forms of vulnerability, it is not clear that such circumstances amount to "membership of a social group".

The 1951 Refugee Convention, then, does not appear easily applicable to climate change migration. Does this mean that the term "climate refugee" should be abandoned? Opinions at the conference diverged on this point, with some feeling the term should be retained, as it carries the moral authority necessary to convey the seriousness of the situation. This was particularly the view of representatives from countries that are expected, in fact, to experience significant population displacement. Others believed that, with the main international organizations apparently unwilling to countenance the term "climate refugees", pursuing it was likely to absorb significant time and energy to little avail.

Other terms coming into general use are "environmentally displaced persons" (EDPs) and "climate change displaced persons". A number of participants voiced reservations concerning the focus on displacement inherent in all these terms. Such a focus is inherently limiting, excluding pre and post stages of the displacement. All three terms also forget persons who, despite being affected or impoverished because of (or exacerbated by) the effects of climate change, choose not to leave. At this point another suggestion surfaced: the term "climate change victims" within a broader framework of climate change adaptation.

These discussions illustrate a struggle between two modes of thinking about labeling: one is based on legalisms (refugees, persecution, 1951 Convention). A second prioritizes the humanitarian urge to make the victims' fates known to the world and to recognize their status such that they can be protected. And yet, these approaches are complementary rather than contradictory: victims presumably deserve protection whether or not they are displaced.

From a legal perspective, a specific issue arises where people are forced to cross borders due to climate change. There are of course pressing issues for those forced to move within the borders of a given state (IDPs). Whereas international oversight of, and assistance in, such situations is indispensable, the relevant state does, or should remain the primary actor in such situations, and is generally subject to clear human rights obligations under international law in

any actions taken. However, protection of persons forced to cross borders raises quite specific concerns, where both state protection and international human rights law are weak, and voluntary documents such as the IDP Guidelines are less applicable.

If cross-border migrants are also unprotected by the 1951 Refugee Convention (as seems at least possible), then some other form of protection at international level is urgently needed to safeguard the rights, needs and human security of persons displaced by climate change. From this perspective, it will be useful for policy-making to have a term referring specifically and clearly to cross-border displacement.

The term "EDPs" may not be adequate to this task, as its natural resonance with IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) will tend to downplay the degree to which such flows are likely to cross borders. Likewise, terms such as "climate migrants" appear to assume a voluntary basis to movement which would not capture the degree to which movement, in these cases, is "forced". The term "climate refugees" therefore remains compelling as accurately capturing the relevant aspects of the scenario. Another possibility is "forced climate migrants".

At the same time, it is vital to draw attention to the wider effects of climate change and to ensure the needs of victims, before, during, and after displacement are at the heart of adaptation policies. From this perspective "climate change victims" and "climate refugees" (or "forced climate migrants") might be regarded as two complementary terms.

What appears clear at present is that, whatever the legal situation, the current guardians of the international refugee regime – the UNHCR and (less officially) the IOM appear unwilling to regard the issue as coming within their ordinary remit. This does not, of course, mean that the term "climate refugee" should therefore be abandoned. Indeed, to the contrary: with the relevant policy space largely vacated by the key actors, others may need to step into the breach and, if so, forceful arguments and powerful terms will presumably be needed.

2. Regime

Much discussion focused on whether current solutions and regimes are sufficient to deal with the problem or not.

The keynote speaker, Frank Biermann, appealed for a sui generis regime for climate change migrants based on an Optional Protocol to UNFCCC and emphasized that climate change induced migration will constitute an unprecedented crisis in human history to which old (current) approaches of dealing with problems will not be able to find answers.

The institutional development of the regime would be rooted in five principles concerned with resettlement (2), international assistance, collective rights and international burden sharing. Such a protocol could provide for an executive committee on the recognition, protection and resettlement of climate refugees. The committee could function under the authority of the Conference of the Parties (COP) (as in the Kyoto Protocol, through a discrete meeting of the parties (MOP)). The Montreal Protocol provides a possibly useful example of how such a committee might function. The committee's task would be to receive applications from countries with a foreseeable climate refugee problem, and to seek solutions in advance, in cooperation with other relevant states.

In order not to put climate refugees in competition for financing with other climate change victims, a sui generis regime for financing was suggested. The operational aspects of a Climate Refugee Protection and Resettlement Fund could be linked with other financial mechanisms to increase efficiency; the governance of the fund should be independent and stand under the authority of the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. Four principles would govern such a fund: a grant basis, the notion that funds would be 'new and additional' to existing development disbursements, the principle that refugees needing relocation due to sea level rise would be fully reimbursed, and the creation of an open list of designated populations as "climate refugees in need of relocation".

In a similar vein, some argued that a new instrument with human rights elements should be created under the UNFCCC umbrella. Others pointed out that new legal instruments of any kind will be politically difficult to achieve, will take many years to negotiate and enter into force, and that the final outcome is any case unpredictable.

It was also argued that functioning regimes already exist to deal with the problem of internal displacement (i.e., IDPs/EDPs), which are supplemented by human rights obligations that need only be linked to climate change. However, it is clear that the IDP regime, which is not in any case very robust, will not provide adequate protection for climate refugees needing to cross borders.

In conclusion, the suggestion to push for an Optional Protocol or a similar new international instrument was welcomed as a long term strategy. Although most participants agreed that such a process would be time-intensive and unpredictable, it would also (as a minimum) ensure that the problem garnered international recognition commensurate with its urgency, and alert the international community to the need for both interim and permanent measures to protect climate refugees.

3. Collective vs. individual rights

Climate change affects groups, communities and even nations. Yet it is individual bearers of human rights holders whose rights are directly affected by the adverse effects of a changing climate. In this context a recurring theme at the meeting concerned the extent to which forced climate migrants should be treated as collective or individual rights bearers. Some argued that a collective rights approach was necessary since climate change effects do not in fact target individuals, that the issues (housing, settlement, emergency measures) arise in any case at the level of groups, and that broader collective rights, such as to cultural autonomy are also at stake in climate change. Indigenous Peoples groups have already pursued collective rights aspects of climate change. Others pointed out that if rights are implemented collectively there is a great risk of overlooking individual cases, particularly of those most vulnerable within the vulnerable groups (i.e., women).

Perhaps the issue is not so much between different kinds of right, but different kinds of remedial action. Remedies, compensation, rehousing and other measures are perhaps best undertaken at the collective level, but this need not involve impinging upon the exercise of individual rights. One area where collective rights must surely be respected in treating mass migration from climate change is the preservation of ways of life (rights to culture) in the event of the entire disappearance of territories, a threat facing some Pacific islands. If whole peoples are forced to move, international support will be vital in ensuring their cultural ways are kept alive.

4. States' obligations

Under international human rights law, a state bears human rights obligations towards all persons within its jurisdiction. In addition, it is often observed that certain extraterritorial obligations can be derived from human rights law provisions. Participants pointed out that some extraterritorial human rights obligations are apparently indicated in the ICESCR, Article 2(1) of which mentions an obligation on states to utilize available 'international assistance' towards the fulfillment of the relevant rights. Some subsequent interpretations of the Covenant, including by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, would appear to support this broad case, although states have been slow to accept any such duty as binding.

If state obligations are still evolving in the area of human rights, they are somewhat clearer in other areas of international law. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) in the UNFCCC recognizes that developed countries are obliged to take the lead and help other states in dealing with climate change. International law also generally recognizes state responsibility for transboundary harms, environmental and otherwise. These are among several areas where the effective responsibility of some states for the likelihood of climate change migration may translate into a hard legal responsibility. How such responsibilities will play out when states are faced with the reality or inevitability of mass movements of people remains to be seen. But even where the legal case remains malleable, the moral and political case remains compelling.

Participants identified the phenomenon of securitization of the climate change migration issue as potentially problematic. Increasingly governments frame climate migration as a defence concern. When rich country governments approach climate change displacement from a national security angle, some participants pointed out, their interest in solving it may drop—especially if it appears they will not be directly affected. In fact, climate migration is likely to be worst between relatively poorer countries and "climate change refugees" are overwhelmingly likely to be poor and lack mobility over great distances. If national security is superior concern to the rich states the poor and vulnerable displaced will be forgotten.

5. Best practices/lessons learned

Three country case studies concretized the issues and helped identify a number concerns that will need further refinement and elaboration if climate change migration is to be properly apprehended and treated. Each study concerned resettlement following the loss of housing due to flooding or sea level rise, in the past (Mozambique), present (Papua New Guinea) or future (Bangladesh).

Throughout the discussions it was agreed that resettlements are a measure of last resort. There can be no automatic assumption that climate change gives rise to resettlement – which might provide governments with a cover to facilitate resettling populations for other reasons. Rather, any case for climate change resettlement must be well-founded and unavoidable. If resettlement must take place, it should be closely monitored, international support should be forthcoming and may be vital, and international standards should be observed. Furthermore, the process must be owned by those to be resettled – requiring a transparent consultation process, the availability of relevant information for stakeholders, the rehabilitation of climate refugees in their new location, and due regard to traditional knowledge and local cultures throughout.

The people of Bangladesh are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, with predictions over the next century reaching truly catastrophic proportions. According to the fourth IPCC assessment report, Bangladesh is expected to lose about 8 percent of its rice and 32 percent of its wheat productivity by 2050. A one-metre rise in sea-level will put 20 percent of Bangladesh's landmass under water and inundate the whole of the Sundarbans national park, the world's largest mangrove forest. Up to 20 million people are at risk. Saudia Anwer of Prodipan Bangladesh argued that, given the unprecedented nature of this problem, the language of "climate refugees" must be adopted in order to motivate action, and that some system of redress or compensation for those suffering losses due to climate change must be put in place. Bangladesh will need to account for climate refugees in its national adaptation plans and climate change strategy. It must also begin to seek international help in various ways, such as readying other countries to accept skilledand semi-skilled migrant workers at a minimum, as well as to accept climate refugees. Significant attention must be paid to infrastructural development and otherwise integrating relocation into development policy.

The Mozambique case study discussed the resettlement policy response by the government to the floods of 2000. The policy involved the construction of new modern housing for flood victims from low-lying regions, who themselves participated in the construction. Over time, however, the new housing was eventually abandoned. The project's relative lack of success was explained as being due a number of factors:

- Little consultation with the beneficiaries, who did not "own" the project;
- Disregard for local knowledge;
- Lack of access to agricultural land for beneficiaries;
- Disregard for people's livelihoods (distances from the workplaces were unsustainable);
- Lack of basic infrastructure (water sewage, schools);
- Degraded environment of the resettlement area;
- Fear among beneficiaries of losing land in the fertile low-lying areas;
- Lack of information.

In response to this presentation a representative of the government of Mozambique noted the challenge facing the government at the time, as the primary duty of every government is to protect life. This is the main driver for resorting to resettlement.

A third case study related to Papua New Guinea / Bougainville. The inhabitants of the Carteret Islands, which are at serious risk of submersion due to climate change sea level rise, may need new homes in future, and the issue has become a live one on the islands. Resettlement was discussed as well as general adaptation matters taken in the Pacific region. A series of difficult questions arise if populations are to leave behind the territories upon which they have survived for countless generations. This is especially so for peoples for whom the link to the land is strong or constitutive, as is the case in many of the South Pacific islands. How are cultures and identities to be maintained if people are required to leave behind their homes?

6. Suggested strategies for further action

The discussions on further strategy for action regarding climate migration can be organized into three interdependent categories. Participants put forward a number of suggestions regarding strategy for action of the NGO community on the local, national and international level.

LOCAL LEVEL

1) People affected by climate disasters are themselves creative at finding ways to adapt. Further work is needed to define how this potential can be explored, organized and channeled.

2) Big centralized humanitarian aid is often poorly targeted. More people could be helped if governments were committed to coordinating closely with civil society and local government. This approach would also foster acceptance and ownership of the implemented policies on the part of the affected people.

3) Work towards increasing local capacity, supporting communities and households. Educate and build information-sharing networks. Encourage bigger engagement of the private sector with a focus on Corporate Social Responsibility. Work towards achieving balance between response, prevention and recovery strategies. Design "shadow strategies" and lobby for them with local and national authorities.

4) Advocate for turning people into subjects and not objects of policies. Ownership of and participation in the process is crucial for achieving any success. Victims need to be turned into agents of the process.

5) Encourage collective action and sense of community of a local level through:

- Praying together, adopting a spirit of reference to creation and to one another.
- Speaking and acting together
- Creating awareness, which is a catalyst for a shared concern and action-workshops, media friendly information, dancing, story telling
- Identifying the most vulnerable and providing platforms for them
- Providing authoritative research
- Lobbying in creative ways
- Engaging the private sector
- Knowledge-sharing in the grassroots
- Organization building, organizing civil society and channeling the power of many voices to create impact
- Awareness-building and trust-building
- Fostering dialogue in the research process and documenting community concerns.

NATIONAL LEVEL

1) Engage the media proactively. Educate parliamentarians and support them in constructive motions. The protection of human rights is a catchy subject.

2) Go to national authorities, representatives on a national level and decision-makers and let them know what works on a local scale. Connect them to on-the-ground experience and give them a clearer picture of who suffers and how it can be prevented or remedied. Spearhead bottom-up action by bringing in actors "from the field" and giving a high profile to traditional local knowledge. Show how traditional and modern technologies can be combined in national strategies.

3) Build national networks of organizations. Come up with a strategy on how to move forward in a coordinated way. Identify leverage points and allies, and work together towards a common goal.

4) Build bridges between different policy communities. Approach policy communities to encourage them to determine what role they can play in solving the puzzle.

5) Clarification of the terminology will help policymakers.

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

1) Large humanitarian organizations often miss the link to local communities. Try to influence the agenda of the main humanitarian actors.

2) Catalogue and pursue the various different options for acquiring a recognized status for climate change displaced persons. There was some discussion over whether the pursuit of a soft-law option was strategically smart – as it may be more easy to achieve than treaty law – or unwise, as states tend to agree to soft law instruments that they can then evade with impunity.

3) Explore the available routes towards granting people a recognized status. Then prepare documentation and pursue campaigns that will convince states to follow a given route.

4) Bring more attention to human rights in the climate change regime. This must be done with caution, as some states will represent human rights as "poisonous" to negotiations. But it is worth raising the point that state parties to the UNFCCC are also signatories to the human rights conventions and are bound by them.

5) Climate change raises significant problems for the classic notion of the nation state. This is one of the reasons put forward by the participants not to pursue the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) as an option for managing it. Other reservations included arguments that R2P will not work as it applies only to genocide and other serious violations and it is still an emerging international law norm.

6) Exert influence over the regional blocks through national decision-makers. This is particularly true for the SIDS block where decision-makers are close to the people.

7) Be careful in choosing messages. In addressing forced displacement it will be important to remain cautious about potentially volatile issues such as compensation or human rights text. While adopting a pragmatic approach with the UNFCCC, it is also possible to pursue climate change in Geneva with the Human Rights Council. Instead of importing human rights into climate change, import climate change into human rights.

8) Although human rights may be volatile in the negotiating rooms they can nevertheless be effective "in the corridors" by refocusing discussion on states' obligations. Persistence and determination will be needed.

9) Develop a strategy on how to develop and derive climate change victims' rights from civil and political rights and how their participation in the decision-making process can be enhanced. Look into how the local communities can play a key role and have ownership over the response.

10) Emphasize the importance of "vulnerable individuals" as well as, or rather than, "vulnerable states" in order to retain a human rights perspective.

11) Form NGO partnerships in key countries. Develop fundraising strategies in connection with concrete adaptation needs.

12) Climate change is a global problem, but we are not globally organized or represented, there is no global public, global media or global governance. Seek ways to remedy this situation. Civil society is important but pragmatically we need to link local and global. For global-level advocacy we need global information.

13) Look into the role of social movements in transforming victims into agents of change.

Conclusion

Wrapping up, it was stressed that the principal needs are for new thinking, for reform of the global governance system, for the nurturing of a "global public" able to represent and address the global public interest. Two approaches were postulated in the course of the meeting. First, a "visionary" approach, with a new Optional Protocol to the UNFCCC as a possible goal; second a "pragmatic" approach exploring all existing avenues for a slow but sure progress in furthering the cause of human rights through the climate change process. Many participants saw an Optional Protocol as a good but far-fetched idea and stressed the need for solid interim measures. But it may also be necessary to keep a visionary "horizon" in view even while pursuing solid practical steps.

What is the role of the churches in addressing climate change refugees? The church can enhance the participation of local people(s), while pointing to human rights language and procedures, including complaint procedures and standard setting mechanisms, in order to ensure that victims become active stake holders. Invoking human rights language means foregrounding the protection of people suffering from the impacts of climate change. The churches must raise the urgency of victims' rights on each relevant occasion. They must also be ready to rock the boat occasionally, where complacency about the suffering of climate change victims becomes dominant, as is frequently the case.

In addition, the churches can develop their role as a platform of exchange and exposure, reaching out, for example, to members of parliament or parliamentary committees and members of local communities; seeking cooperation among existing civil society organization dealing with climate change. In addition, the churches are well positioned to enhance social mobilization, resistance and empowerment among the suffering people and their supporters. Climate change for churches should mean seeking justice.

From this perspective it is important to remember that climate change is not just about law and legal instruments; it is also about making governments change their policies and concepts on development. The churches might therefore aim to identify "champions" among states and governments. Candidates might include, for example, the Arctic Council, the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative (PICCC) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

Climate change presents challenges at many levels, but it is above all a challenge to the imagination. In order to determine how to avoid immense population displacement, we need first to imagine the kind of world that will permit mass forced migration—and we must then imagine another kind of world. We need to imagine not only how to bring our carbon consumption down but also how to help our fellows in other parts of the world adapt to climate change. What kind of adaptation is relevant to migration? Sea walls? Cities on stilts? New canal systems? We need to start now to construct this future world. But we also need to imagine what it will mean if we fail. Indeed, it seems increasingly short-sighted to assume we will avoid sea-level rise or manage adaptive measures, given the tortuously slow progress of negotiations to date. We need to imagine that millions will, one day not too far away, be on the move, and we need to start thinking now about the appropriate way to manage this eventuality.

Key words: climate change, state, role of civil society, international institutions, securitization of the problem, unpredictability and discrepancy of science, best practices and case studies, terminology, visionary vs. pragmatic approach, transparency, ownership, local communities, information sharing, collective vs. individual rights, competing agendas, financing and compensation, extraterritorial obligations, complaint procedures and social mobilization.

- **A joint WCC-CEC AGAPE consultation: "Linking poverty, wealth and ecology: ecumenical perspectives in Europe - Budapest call for climate justice", 12 November 2010**

We, delegates of churches from 32 European countries and participants from churches from all over the world met in Budapest from 8 – 12 November 2010 for the consultation "Poverty, wealth and ecology in Europe". The consultation was part of a broad ecumenical process initiated by the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre in 2006.

In visiting local communities, we have been faced with the impacts of the economic crisis in Hungary. We have learned about the exclusion of Roma and the difficulties of migrants. We have discussed widespread poverty in the rich continent of Europe, worsened by the present financial collapse. We are concerned by growing injustice, social polarization and sharpening regional disparities of Europe. We note the broad social and economic gap between old and new member states of the European Union. We recognize that great sections of Eastern Europe and many in the Western parts in the present situation are confronted with the suffering of people living under abject poverty, and that this is therefore a priority of the churches concerned. We acknowledge that we are part of societies which are obsessed by the ideology of growth and consumerism. We demand that people should be in the centre of economic policies.

We have criticized the primacy of economy over people and creation as a whole. We recognize the relational character of life in the 'community of creation' and the special God-given responsibility of human beings in this community. We recognize the fundamental interdependence between human societies and the rest of creation, and their ultimate dependence on God the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer. Therefore, we as the people of God are called to participate in the work of God in this world, extending God's love and care to all human and non-human members of the 'community of creation'.

We recognize that unsustainable methods of wealth creation and the adherence to unlimited growth impoverish communities and harm creation as a whole. We have learned how challenges of injustice and climate change are interlinked. We have stressed that social and climate justice belong together.

In the light of these insights, which we identify as signs of a profound spiritual crisis, we, the delegates of European churches released the "Budapest call for climate justice – addressing poverty, wealth and ecology".

And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.
(Micah 6,8)

Call for climate justice

I. The great challenge calls for the "great transition"
The world is confronted with urgent challenges. The global impacts of climate change are the greatest threat to the future of our planet. The concurrence of climate change, limitation of fossil fuels, climate change induced migration, food crisis, water crisis, energy crisis,

biodiversity crisis and the 2008-2009 financial and economic crisis, deepening the debt crises affecting individuals and states, might be indicators that the whole system of production, consumption, profit maximization, poverty and ecological destruction prevailing in industrialized countries runs into a deep and open-ended transformation crisis. The concurrence of these crises calls for urgent action.

To handle these challenges, extensive and radical changes are needed. These changes will have to be implemented locally, regionally, nationally and globally. Climate justice should be the guiding principle for these changes. Climate justice should be realized between people, countries and generations, human and non humans and with the Earth itself. Climate justice requires social justice. Climate justice includes the implementation of the right to development, particularly in weaker economies. Climate justice requires the development of renewable energy and economies of sufficiency inspired by an ethic of self-limitation. Climate justice is a condition for the eradication of poverty and the eradication of poverty is a condition for climate justice. Climate justice demands the primacy of democratic politics over economics and the embedding of market economies in social and cultural contexts (further developing the social market economy). Therefore holistic answers to the challenges are required – from the individual person, from the economy, from states and internationally. The time for fragmented and technocratic solutions is over. We need a "great transition".

Therefore, the delegates of the Budapest consultation on "Poverty, wealth and ecology in Europe" call upon the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and its organs and member churches to address the European governments and parliaments, both inside and outside the European Union (EU), as well as the institutions of the EU on the following urgent issues:

- Climate justice, and therefore both social and ecological values, should be a central goal of policy-making. In industrialized countries economic growth should no longer be seen as an aim in itself.
- European countries and the EU should politically and financially support green growth in developing countries in order to allow for the development of renewable energy.
- Tax systems must be reformed in order to be at the service of just, participatory and sustainable societies and communities, as well as to promote justice on the global scale.
- Financial transaction tax must be implemented, if necessary starting unilaterally in the EU.
- Prices on goods and services should reflect true social and ecological costs and benefits.
- "Green investment banks" helping to finance green investments should be promoted.
- Coal-fired power stations and nuclear power stations should be replaced by renewable energy as soon as possible, richer European countries should support poorer ones in so doing.
- A redistribution of wealth and income as a key element of environmentally sustainable societies is necessary.
- The redistribution of wealth and sharing of technology between rich countries and poor countries affected by climate change are crucial elements of climate justice and have to go along with additional support for climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- The EU should commit itself to more ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets regardless of policies of other large economies.

- The market sphere needs to be informed and limited by the public sphere and the real "core economy" – namely our ability to care, teach, learn, empathize and live in solidarity.
- Democracy should be strengthened so that long-term perspectives shape political decisions and people affected by decisions have a say. Economies based on renewable energy entail the development of new employment opportunities. This also requires education that enables people to participate and contribute in this emerging society.
- People living in poverty and social exclusion, including marginalized migrants, shall participate in the definition, design and implementation of all measures which affect them according to the principle "Nothing about us without us is for us".

The great transition will not be easy. But it is possible. We can take first steps. We have the technologies, we have the knowledge, we have the resources required. We only need the will to do what we should do.

II. God's promises encourage us to start

The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains,
the world, and those who dwell in it.
(Psalm 24,1)

In addressing poverty, wealth and ecology, we should build on the church's mission in society and act in harmony with creation. We are committed to carry out this work with other people of faith and together with all who share this aspiration. Working towards the spiritual and moral renewal of society, Christians are meant to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world (Mt 5,13-14). They are sent to bring peace, understanding, and hence social justice, since all creation belongs to God.

Jesus says: "*What you did to one of the least of these, who belong to me, you did for me*" (Matthew 25,40) and he asks us: "*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets*."(Matthew 7,12)

This should be the fundamental motive and measure of the relationship of Christians to solving the issues of injustice and poverty.

Human beings and the entire creation live with the consequences of sin. Created in the image of God, as human beings we are called to reflect the liberty and generosity of God. Our salvation also is the restoration of a broken relationship with this whole created order. Through the death and power of the resurrection, Jesus Christ has overcome the powers of death and has become our hope. Therefore the church is called to be a sign of hope to this world. The way of recovery lies in repentance and "synergeia" with Jesus Christ concerning the renewal of human society. The churches have to provide a witness of Christ's Truth and to work on spiritual rebirth of the human being. Self-restraint and simplicity, ascesis, are essential in order to be conformed to the way of Jesus.

Churches in their different contexts have common but differentiated responsibilities. They need global ecumenical dialogue in order to define these responsibilities and to strengthen each other in living it out.

The communion within the global ecumenical movement helps churches to discover the signs of hope. This we experienced through the promising outcomes of the first stage of the direct

dialogue of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) on threats and challenges of globalization.

The global ecumenical movement helps churches to understand to what extent their work and witness for climate justice is a matter of faith.

There are encouraging examples of European churches already making many efforts in order to contribute towards climate justice. But there is still a long way to go.

Therefore we, the delegates of the Budapest consultation on "Poverty, wealth and ecology in Europe", call upon European churches and on European church-related and diaconal organizations to:

- be prepared to use their influence and positions to take a firm stand and to take a risk where necessary when it comes to conflicts following God's preferential option for the poor;
- make use of the WCC "Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt" in their approach to governments and in their relationship with official institutions, companies and church members;
- acknowledge the close link between the fight against poverty and the struggle for climate justice in their strategic and practical approaches;
- reflect on the impact of their policies as well as the lifestyles of their members on both the climate and on vulnerable and poor people;
- contribute to the necessary financial and personnel resources to the World Council of Churches (WCC) so that it can take a lead in the global fight for climate justice. This needs to be developed in close cooperation and coordination of the WCC with Regional Ecumenical Organizations and in Europe with CEC. Direct links between churches from different continents and regional ecumenical organizations have to be strengthened and more structured;
- to fully support the call of the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) 2010 in Grand Rapids, "in cooperation with WCC and other ecumenical bodies, networks and organizations to prepare a global ecumenical conference to propose the framework and criteria for a new international financial and economic architecture that is based on the principles of economic, social and climate justice";
- be pioneers and examples on the way to sufficiency by implementing practical programmes on reducing CO2 emissions, e.g., environmental certificates for parishes, increasing the knowledge and solidarity as well as exemplifying different sets of values and fulfillment as alternatives to consumerism and striving for life according to the "principle of enough".

Finally, the delegates of the Budapest consultation on "Poverty, wealth and ecology in Europe" call upon the World Council of Churches:

- to put climate justice and poverty eradication and the relationship between the two as a priority on the agenda of its 10th General Assembly in South Korea in 2013.

It is true that there is a silly, cowardly kind of optimism, which we must condemn. But the optimism that is the will for the future should never be despised, even if it is proved wrong a hundred times.

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, 1945)

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,
plans of peace and not of suffering, to give you a future and a hope.
(Jeremiah 29:11)

- **The "Budapest ecumenical youth declaration" issued at the end of a joint WCC-CEC consultation on poverty, wealth and ecology in Europe, 12 November 2010**

In response to the call to raise the voice of young people on climate justice, we the young delegates of WCC-CEC consultation "Poverty, wealth and ecology", representing young Christians in Europe through the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe, World Student Christian Federation Europe Region and SYNDESMOS, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, present the following contribution to be taken into account in the process of the global ecumenical AGAPE consultation.

Our disharmony with God and Creation has led to a deeply complex global crisis, which calls for urgent action. Following up the statement by the participants of the WSCF-E and EYCE joint study session *Climate Justice Now!*, "as young Christians we acknowledge that we should be agents of change, living examples and multipliers of a sustainable way of life. Solidarity and social justice on local, national and Global levels should be manifested through education, prayer, lobbying and sharing our expertise".

We call upon CEC, WCC and the global ecumenical community to:
1 Be the headliner and example in living according to the sufficient way of life, "principles of enough" and just treatment of all the Creation.

2 Address the poverty and economic injustice on global level as the main underlying factor of climate change. Embracing solidarity on a personal, local and worldwide level must be the first step in the Global transformation process.

3 Initiate and strengthen the dialogue with the stakeholders through enabling and empowering the churches to bring the local realities, good practices and expertise into this dialogue, thus working for possible joint solutions.

4 Approach education from a broader perspective by building a knowledgeable society for economic and social justice and solidarity, through formal, non-formal and informal education, i.e.,, school programmes, youth activities, volunteering, media, art, family, pastoral work etc. The churches have the capacity and role to play in shaping all of these sectors.

5 Provide more opportunities for youth to participate, contribute and influence CEC's work on poverty, wealth and ecology as young people and youth organizations have enthusiasm, possibilities and methodology to reach out to groups in society, which are not always accessible for churches and official structures.

We as young people, being representatives of the churches on the grassroots level and in the local structures, commit ourselves to strive to fulfil these recommendations.

Declared in WCC-CEC consultation on "Poverty, wealth and ecology", Budapest, 12th of November 2010.

- **Statement delivered at the high-level ministerial segment of the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UNFCCC and the 6th session of the Meeting of the Parties (CPM6) to the Kyoto Protocol, Cancún, México 10 December 2010**

A plea for immediate action
"No more delays: life on earth is in peril"

Madam President,
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

*"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy"*Proverbs 31:8-9

Fifteen years have passed since we attended the First Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC which met in Berlin in 1995.

Once again we are meeting, completing the first decade of the Third Millennium, in which we had put all our hopes and efforts to solve the severe and urgent problems that are challenging us as inhabitants of the blue planet, our common home.

Time has run past. The problems and their challenges are still here. Scientific knowledge, supported by statistics and climatic models, as well as plain observations made by peasant, farmers, Indigenous Peoples and coastal inhabitants has confirmed that the climate is changing because of human activities and that such change will prove disastrous for life in this planet, while we are still unable to take the unavoidable steps to detain the already tangible and oncoming appalling events.

The urgent challenge is now to continue our work, you as leaders and policy-makers, we as members of the civil society, as people of faith, to overcome the grave menace of climate change, taking into account firstly the care and protection of the Earth as well as of the poorest and more vulnerable communities and countries.

Since the initiation of the process in the early nineties the WCC has been present in all COPs. Together with other faith based organizations, churches and religious communities, we have realized that climate change is also fundamentally a matter of spirituality and ethics. Faith traditions with their core spiritual values for Earth community can play a key role in overcoming the dominant economic model where overconsumption and greed prevail.

In the WCC statement presented at the COP 13 in Bali we recalled that a change of paradigm is needed. This one must include a change in the present climate legal framework, reaffirming the Kyoto Protocol commitments and expanding them to respond to the new situation we face beyond 2010.

As faith-based communities we reiterate our determination to support you in our common efforts to offer security, prosperity and dignity to the life of men, women and children around the world, caring also for all the wonders of God's good Creation, sustaining the treasure of life. A life which needs to be lived with dignity, justice, equity and peace, where the rights of

peoples to safe drinking water, sanitation, clean air and a climate apt to support life may become a reality.

Humankind is at present dancing on the edge of the abyss. We cannot afford another failure from the governments as in Copenhagen. Time is now to put aside self-interest, lack of leadership, postponements and immobility. Time is now for climate justice. Time is now for courageous, equitable and binding agreements.

Do it and you will be remembered, not only by today's world, but also by our children and our children's children as the decision-makers that responsibly addressed one of the major challenges humanity faced and avoided a major tragedy for the Earth and humanity within it.

- ## Joint statement issued by the WCC and LWF delegations to COP16, 13 December 2010

Why are the churches at the UN Conference on Climate Change in Cancun?
After the failure of COP15 in Copenhagen in reaching a fair, ambitious and binding deal to effectively address the climate change crisis, many in the churches and the civil society at large have asked: why should we go to COP16 in Cancun? What for? Is it worth going?

Churches have been actively engaged in the UNFCCC negotiations since the late 80s in a process that led to the adoption of the UNFCCC in Rio in 1992. When the Convention was ratified and parties started to meet yearly in COPs, the WCC has had a delegation participating at all COPs.

The core of churches' engagement is to remind the negotiators that beyond the technical aspects of mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and funding, there is an ethical responsibility which ought not to be overlooked.

In various ways churches have emphasized the various aspects of the climate change crisis: ecological, social, economic, cultural and political. These aspects should be addressed in a holistic way taking account of their interrelationship. On the basis of biblical teachings and theological convictions the churches have especially reiterated the ethical and spiritual implications of the challenge of climate change.

The UNFCCC already affirms some ethical considerations in the Principles stated in the UNFCCC. Article 3 of the Framework Convention reminds all parties what should guide the international community when responding to climate change challenges. In the turmoil of technical negotiations, unfortunately, these principles are often overlooked or ignored.

Principle 1 refers to the following critical points: a) the concern for present and future generations; b) equity as a basis for climate measures; c) the "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" and d) the role of lead developed countries should have in combating climate change. Principle 2 focuses special attention to the needs and circumstances of developing countries and vulnerable communities. These deserve particular consideration. The "Precautionary Principle" is addressed in Principle 3, stressing the importance of anticipating, preventing or minimizing the causes and mitigating the effects of climate change. Interestingly, the principle already responds to climate skeptics, affirming that "the lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing such

measures". The right to development, specifically sustainable development, is addressed in Principle 4, while links between climate change and economics are highlighted in Principle 5, reminding how intertwined they are.

In the churches' perspective, justice must be the basic criterion of applied ethics in all decisions concerning the measures to cope with climate change [1]. Although climate change is a global issue affecting all peoples and nations, those who are and will increasingly be affected by negative climate change consequences are the vulnerable communities who have contributed the least to global emissions. These include women and children, Indigenous Peoples, poorest communities, people with disabilities and inhabitants of coastal low lying areas. Vulnerable communities and states are also much more dependent on natural resources for their subsistence and do not have the means to mitigate emissions and to adapt to climate change. Their survival is at risk, and justice requires that the nations most responsible historically for the adverse ecological conditions should take the greatest responsibility towards the adaptation of these vulnerable communities and nations. The churches have echoed this principle of justice in statements to earlier COPs, and repeat it here at COP 16 in Cancun.

The call for eco-justice and the recognition of ecological debt [2] are part of the church's witness for the care of Creation. The formulation of demands to repair and repay the climate debt to the poorest, the most vulnerable, future generations and the Earth itself has become the prophetic stance of the churches as it confronts the most serious of ecological crises, the ethical and moral crisis of climate change.

Climate justice should undergird the present negotiations. Churches, through lobby work, side events and statements to the plenary, recall once again this forgotten dimension.

The holistic approach to climate change that churches proclaim also includes the spiritual dimensionwhich must not be overlooked or ignored in the deliberations over political and economic interests. The hosting of ecumenical or interfaith celebrations during the COPs, as well as other explicit expressions like demonstrations and messages from local congregations and communities, stress the particular contribution that faith based groups and organizations can and must bring to the debate. It is our hope that the ethical and spiritual considerations will be taken seriously in the follow-up deliberations after COP 16.

There is, therefore, a moral obligation for the churches and faith communities to participate in the negotiations of the international community in Cancun and in the future. Their contribution is twofold: to urge the world to act for a more just and equitable world and and the same time, rooted in their spiritual teachings, convey a message of hope to the whole world.

- **Joint letter by 25 NGOs to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations regarding the creation of a special procedure on climate change and human rights, 28 February 2011**

Your Excellency,

We respectfully request your attention to the issue of climate change and human rights, an issue that is of vital importance for the human rights of hundreds of millions of the most vulnerable people in the world.

In 2008 (Res. 7/23) and 2009 (Res. 10/4), the Human Rights Council considered the human rights consequence of climate change. Additionally, in March 2009 the high commissioner for Human Rights produced a study and later that year the Council held a special panel on climate change. It is vital that this important work serve as the foundation for further study and action concerning the consequences of the adverse impacts of climate change for human rights. There is an urgent need to elaborate the work done by the Council on climate change for the important UNFCCC meeting that will be held in Durban, South Africa in December 2011. The most effective way of doing this is to establish a Special Procedure on climate change and human rights, such as a special rapporteur, to consider the important issues of climate change that affect human rights.

The resolution being tabled at the 16th regular session of the Human Rights Council on the relationship between the environment and human rights, does not build on the previous work of the Council in relation to climate change. Instead it reverts back to the general issue of environment and human rights that has been on the United Nations' agenda for decades and on which several resolutions have been adopted. While another resolution on the environment and human rights is welcomed, we are very much concerned that this resolution does not adequately address the urgent issue of climate change. Moreover, there is no mention of a Special Procedure in the proposed resolution.

In recent months numerous civil society organizations, including the undersigned, have called for the establishment of a Special Procedure on climate change and human rights at the Council's Social Forum in Geneva, Switzerland, in September 2010. This call was reiterated at the World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in February 2011. We urge you to hear our call. Our planet and the lives of hundreds of millions of vulnerable people are at stake and need you to act.

We strongly urge you to publicly call for the creation of a Special Procedure on climate change and human rights who reports to the Human Rights Council in a resolution to be adopted at the 17th regular session of the Human Rights Council in June 2011.

Thank you for your attention to the voices of civil society.

Signatories listed in alphabetical order:

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University
Catholic Center of Geneva
Center for Law Information (Indonesia)
Centro de Derechos Humanos y Ambiente (Argentina)
Edmund Rice International
FANCA
Franciscans International
Friends of the Earth England, Wales & Northern Ireland
International Environment Forum
International Peace Research Association
International Presentation Association

International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations
International-Lawyers.Org
Lutheran World Federation
Nord-Sud XXI/ North-South-XXI
Northern Alliance for Sustainability
Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance
Planetary Association for Clean Energy (Canada)
Samata-India
Stand Up For Your Rights
UNESCO Etxea
WaterLex
World Council of Churches
Worldwide Organization of Women

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP 17), 23 November 2011**

A new UN Conference on Climate Change will take place in Durban in 28 November– 10 December. Though because of the global financial crisis climate change is not on the headlines as it used to be some years ago, we cannot forget the climate change crisis the world is living in which is especially affecting vulnerable communities.

Since the early 70s the WCC has been advocating for building sustainable communities. This has become even more relevant today when it has become imperative to build a low-carbon future. This is a must to improve the living conditions for all through sustainable energy means. Some countries in the North and in the South, in the East and in the West, have already started to develop ambitious programmes in this regard.

Mobilization around climate change has shown that many people are ready and enthusiastic about making the necessary changes.

Through my visits to member churches in different parts of the world I have been able to witness how communities are able to mitigate, adapt and be creative in responding to the climate change challenges. For instance, when I attended the 50th anniversary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, celebrated in September 2011, in Samoa, it became clear that this part of the world is under threat by rising ocean waters that accompany global climate change and churches in the region are already responding to this challenge. Some weeks ago, the WCC member church in Tuvalu expressed the critical situation they are living with the lack of fresh water.

At the international level, it is clear that an international law or laws are needed to effectively tackle climate change. Together with communities' resilience and individual government actions a fair, ambitious and binding climate regime is needed to guarantee sufficient climate action at scale.

Although many of us were impressed by the churches' and civil society's mobilization in Copenhagen at COP15, where I had the opportunity to be present, the Conference failed to adequately respond to the climate challenges. Last year, in COP 16 in Cancun, governments

came to an agreement that brought back the possibility of international negotiations on the climate regime. But this was not enough.

Durban might be the last opportunity for the international community to be responsible in addressing climate change.

To do this, Durban must adopt:
1. A Second Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol (the only legally binding instrument we have up to now setting clear targets for greenhouse gas emissions).

2. A clear mandate to conclude negotiations on a legally binding instrument or instruments by 2015. Under the Long-term Cooperative Action, steps must be made to ensure that a binding legal regime where the UNFCCC principles, especially of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, future generations, and sustainable developments prevail.

3. A set of measures to operationalize the Green climate fund, realizing the promise of the Cancun agreements in order that it can become an effective tool for adaptation in the most vulnerable regions.

This time in Durban, religious communities, especially from Africa, have come together in various ways to express that climate change is also a moral and spiritual crisis. We proclaim together "We have faith. Act now for climate justice".

Churches and religious communities witness at their congregations how climate change is affecting lives and livelihoods of entire societies as well as the earth created by God. Peoples' rights are threatened, environments are destroyed, the whole creation is groaning.

The earth and its inhabitants cannot wait any longer. We call WCC member churches, the whole ecumenical movement and other religions to continue praying and speaking out, voicing the cries of the poor and the earth at these crucial times.

I join you in your prayers and as churches, and I affirm together with you: We have faith! It is time for climate justice!

- **Statement by the World Council of Churches read at the high-level segment of the 17th Conference of Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Durban, South Africa, 9 December 2011**

Once more, a plea for immediate action
"Climate justice for all"

Session of the meeting of the parties – CMP7 to the Kyoto Protocol

Madam President,
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Sisters and Brothers,

*"Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you."*Deuteronomy 16:20

Since COP1, year after year, the World Council of Churches have spoken on behalf of hundreds of churches, church based organizations, ecumenical movements, and faith based movements throughout the world, that work daily with communities whose lives and livelihoods are severely affected by climate change.

In November 2006 we met here in Africa, in Nairobi, Kenya, on occasion of COP12-MOP2. The World Council of Churches was invited to address the joint plenary of the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol during the high-levelministerial segment.

We shared the statement of the faith communities demanding "Climate justice for all"! And I quote: "*Equitable development for all is possible while managing the ecological integrity of the biosphere. Faith communities are addressing climate change because it is a spiritual and ethical issue of justice, equity, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability. The situation is critical. We must all act now. We pray that you will demonstrate leadership in responding to the cry of the Earth*".

After five years, we come back to Africa and find that the faith communities and the civil society are still pleading, requesting, demanding "Climate justice for all"!

Climate change is cruelly hitting African countries, Pacific Island States and South American and Asian peoples, while you still do not listen to our voices. Where is justice?

Where are you, on whom we deposited our confidence and our expectations for a tomorrow in peace without the unjust menace that will not discriminate against peoples and nations?

Once more, we state the imperious need of an ambitious, just, and legally binding agreement. Targets in the long and short term for GHG emission reduction must be agreed in order to achieve an average global temperature increase well below 2 degrees centigrade.

Once more, we demand a strong leadership role of the parties involved assuring a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol, a protocol that must ensure a more principle-based approach, crucial for reaching an effective, equitable and justifiable global climate policy regime.

Durban might be the last opportunity for the international community to be responsible in addressing climate change. To do this, Durban must adopt a package, consisting out of three main elements:

1. A Second Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol, the only legally binding instrument we have up to now setting clear targets for GHG emissions.

2. A clear mandate to conclude negotiations on a legally binding instrument or instruments by 2015. Under the long-term cooperative action, steps must be taken to ensure that a binding legal regime is agreed by all countries, where the UNFCCC principles, especially of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, future generations, and sustainable development prevail.

3. A set of measures to implement all Cancún agreements, including the Green Climate Fund, in order it can become an effective financing tool for low carbon development, adaptation and an adequate answer to loss and damage in the most vulnerable regions.

This time in Durban, religious communities, especially from Africa, have come together in various ways to express that climate change is also a moral and spiritual crisis. We proclaim together: "We have faith. Act now for climate justice!"

The countries that have polluted the most ought to recognize their ecological debt guaranteeing an appropriate financing for adaptation and low carbon development purposes to those countries that polluted the less.

We contemplate a new era of turbulence. To avoid its devastating consequences we urgently need a change of paradigm, as we expressed in our Statement to the plenary during COP13-CMP3 Bali, in 2007. This shift of attitude and actions are needed in order to create a new world. We believe that another world is possible!

The time has arrived to accelerate the process of achieving quantifiable goals to restore our common home, planet Earth, rather than merely discuss about future steps to be taken to restore, our common home, planet Earth.

"But let justice roll down like waters,
and the righteousness like an overflowing stream."
Amos 5:24

Thank you very much.

- **Message from WCC general secretary to the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and Peoples' Summit, 13 June 2012**

"Hope in the future"

To our fellow human beings gathered to carry out our common responsibility for our common future,

"We write with a sense of urgency. The earth is in peril. Our only home is in plain jeopardy. For the very first time in the history of creation, certain life support systems of the planet are being destroyed by human actions". These could be words for today, but were part of the letter to the churches written by participants of a WCC meeting in Baixada Fluminense during the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. We, as people of faith in God, still believe and hope in the future.

Unfortunately, the situation has not improved in these last twenty years. On the contrary, scientific reports have shown that we are in an even more dangerous situation. Our children are asking why we have not been able to achieve more in these 20 years. And WCC member churches from various regions have consistently reported that vulnerable communities are already experiencing the negative effects of climate change and environmental degradation

while poverty and inequity continue to be a major challenge. We are accountable to our Creator for what we have done and what we have not done for the one creation.

The Earth Summit in 1992 was a sign of hope for the future. From it, we received the so called Rio Conventions (on Biodiversity, Desertification and Climate Change), the Earth Charter and the Rio Declaration, which offered a framework to respond to the challenges posed to the environment. But the international community has not been able to implement effective responses, the failure of the climate negotiations in reaching a new binding agreement being a clear example. However, the Rio principles continue to be valid today and need to be explicitly reaffirmed when the world faces new challenges.

As the international community gathers at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD2012 or Rio+20), governments have the opportunity to recommit to past agreements and agree on a roadmap for the sustainable future we want[7]. Let us together believe that we can make changes for a better world, step-by-step. I am well aware that Rio+20 by itself will not change the world; but, it can and should be a catalyst for concrete initiatives to overcome the short term perspectives that have been predominant in recent international negotiations. The outcome from Rio+20 should therefore comprise a set of clear targets and timetables for a sustainable future which must include accountability and reporting measures.

Last year the WCC's International Ecumenical Peace Convocation held in Kingston, Jamaica, addressed violence in its various manifestations. The *Ecumenical Call for Just Peace* clearly states that "human beings are to respect and protect creation. But greed at many levels, self-centeredness and a belief in unlimited growth have brought exploitation and destruction on the earth and its creatures. The cries of the poor and vulnerable echo in the groans of the earth. Excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other limited resources is doing violence to people and the planet. Climate change as a consequence of human lifestyles poses a global threat to Just Peace. Global warming, the rise of sea levels and the increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and floods affect especially the most vulnerable populations in the world." Being aware how poverty, ecological crisis and violence are intertwined, justice and peace criteria should permeate the contents of a green economy, one of the main themes at UNCSD2012, which should be based in principles such as sustainability, dignity, equity, sufficiency, inclusion and resilience, dismantling and abandoning a "greed economy" to move into a sharing economy for the survival of all, rich and poor, and taking our responsibility for future generations. The present situation does not allow us to irresponsibly continue with business as usual. We must find a Just Peace with the earth and one another.

WCC delegates at Rio+20 will be involved in various activities both at the venue of the official UNCSD2012 and at the Peoples Summit. Together as people of many faiths, we are united in our concern and prayer for the future of our planet. The "Religions for rights" cluster will raise various concerns and alternatives from an interfaith perspective. I urge government representatives to listen to the calls coming from communities, civil society at large and from us who represent people of faith and hope for change and let us hear you respond to our contributions and expectations of you.

The theme for the next WCC 10th Assembly to be held next year in Busan, Republic of Korea, is "God of life, lead us to justice and peace". It is this God of life who encouraged ecumenical

[7] « The future we want » is the title of the draft outcome document of the UNCSD2012.

participants at the Earth Summit in 1992 to proclaim: “There is hope (2Cor 4:7-12). Our God is a God of life and the power of the Holy Spirit permeates all creation”.

We do have hope. Even in spite of hopeless circumstances (Rom 4:18), we believe God renews the whole creation through the Spirit (Psalm 104:30) so that life prevails. May the same Spirit inspire delegates at Rio+20 so that they can deliver a most needed, significant outcome to address the threats humanity and the earth are facing.

In solidarity and hope,
Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement from the WCC delivered at the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to the high-level ministerial segment of COP 18 in Doha Qatar, 7 December 2012**

“*The world cannot wait – climate change is happening*!”

Mr President, His Excellency Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:19

As in previous statements, we reiterate that a change in paradigm appears as mandatory in the prevailing economic strategy of promoting endless growth and a seemingly insatiable level of consumption among the high-consuming sectors of our societies. Such economic and consumption patterns are leading to the depletion of critical natural resources and to extremely dangerous implications with climate change and development. We are living on a finite world with finite resources and within given planetary boundaries making obviously that infinite growth in consumption of energy and resources is impossible in a finite system.

As people of faith concerned for our sisters and brothers, we come to Doha extremely worried about food security as the severe shortages in crops face us with the prospect of horrific humanitarian crises that should be avoided. The present situation at world food markets, exemplified by sharp increases in wheat, soybean and corn prices compels leaders to act urgently to be sure that these outstanding high prices do not drive into an appalling scenario, harming tens of millions.

The above-described situation that release in many variables as how we produce trade and consume food as well as millions of human beings to be fed every year, is worsened by the fact that only a handful of nations are large producers of staple food commodities. This year we realized how a disastrous drought in the U.S.A., the worst in half a century, as well as in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, sent grain prices skyrocketing. With the menace of human-induced climate change incrementing extreme weather events, increasing water scarcity and negatively impacting agro-meteorological conditions in the tropics and subtropics, the world is at high risk of see this state of affairs to devastate societies.

Time has arrived to promote more sustainable and climate resilient food production to urgently make more food available to sustain the human family especially in the most vulnerable societies, ill prepared to deal with food scarcity. Moreover, diversion of food stock for non-food purposes and financial speculation are unethical and immoral.

Our stance is not to formulate policies, a task of the parties, but to demand urgent and achievable policies bringing to the parties our concern about essential values and principles as well as the distress and voice of the actors that are not normally heard.

We need to call your attention that the Framework Convention focalized in ethical principles as *The Principle of Intergenerational Equity* that declares "the parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind." Let be remembered by our children and our children's children as the decision-makers that responsibly addressed climate change, one of the major challenges humanity have ever faced, and avoided a major calamity for the Earth and humanity. Let be reminded, that our generation is probably the very last generation having it in our hands to still limit global warming to less than 2ºC while future generations won't have this freedom of choice but will have to adapt to climate patterns we have left to them.

Parties' negotiators have not yet translated declarations on tackling climate change to a fair, ambitious and legally binding regime to all parties. From our perspective, it is most crucial to achieve that outcome by 2015 at the latest. As pre-requisites, we consider (i) the ratification of the 2nd Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol by as many parties as possible in Doha, (ii) complementary mitigation pledges of the non-signees of the 2nd CP under the Convention, (iii) the successful closure of the LCA track including the carry-over of important negotiation issues like adaptation, climate finance and loss and damage to the new ADP negotiation mandate, (iv) continuation and scaling-up of climate finance for developing countries, and (v) the agreement on an ambitious negotiation mandate with roadmap, milestones and a chairmanship being empowered to give the guidance needed. We pray that you will demonstrate leadership in responding to the cry of the Earth.

The World Council of Churches believes that the whole Earth community deserves to benefit from the bounties of creation. Faith communities are addressing climate change because it is a spiritual and ethical issue of justice, equity, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability.

Climate change is happening! It is imperative to act now without more delays in view of the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of climate change.

- **Minute on climate justice adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the water". (Psalm 24)

"...cease to do evil and learn to do right; Pursue justice and champion the oppressed Give the orphan his rights, plead the widow's case". (Isaiah 1:16b-17*)*

Climate change is today one of the most challenging global threats affecting especially the most vulnerable. The World Council of Churches (WCC) was among the first to warn about the dangers of climate change. Now after 20 years of advocacy, churches have helped bring ecological justice into the international debate on climate.

The WCC governing bodies have developed policy on climate change. Furthermore, the WCC has also presented statements to the high-level segment of the Conference of Parties (COPs) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In recent years churches and specialized ministries have increased their advocacy efforts. Together with Christian churches, interfaith initiatives have also shown how faith communities have reached consensus in addressing the climate change crisis.

Despite being a most crucial issue, climate change has lost priority on the public and political agendas. While there are some encouraging signs, nonetheless climate change negotiations at the international level have not realized the stated goals.

In September 2013, the first part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report was delivered confirming the gravity of climate change and the consequences it already has, among them the rise of sea level, the melting of glaciers and polar ice, the further increase of the strength and frequency of floods, tropical storms and droughts. The report also evidenced the growing consensus in the scientific community on the human causes of climate change.

The effects of climate change are being experienced already now. Churches in countries like Tuvalu, Kiribati, Bangladesh, the Philippines as well as the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations are already addressing the tragedies associated with climate displaced people.

Victims of climate change are the new face of the poor, the widow and the stranger that are especially loved and cared for by God (Deut. 10:17-18). When creation is threatened in this way, churches are called to speak out and act as an expression of their commitment to life, justice and peace.

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, 30 October – 8 November 2013, therefore:

A. ***Reiterates*** the concerns of the churches over climate change and its adverse effects on the whole of creation and especially on vulnerable communities in many parts of the world;

B. ***Encourages*** member churches to support the role of the WCC in enabling an ecumenical pilgrimage for justice and peace to strengthen links between churches and communities in various parts of the world working together to care for creation and eco-justice; and

C. ***Calls*** upon churches and ecumenical organizations to insist that the respective governments look beyond national interests in order to be responsible towards God’s creation and our common future, and urge them to safeguard and promote the basic human rights of those who are threatened by the effects of climate change and particularly those church representatives present at COP19 in Warsaw, Poland, to urge the Polish COP presidency to increase the ambitions of the Warsaw outputs; and

D. ***Welcomes*** the climate change plan of the White House and calls upon the president of the United States to reject the building of the Keystone Pipeline in the United States of America.

- **WCC statement to the high-level ministerial segment of the 19th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP19 to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 9th session of the meeting of the parties – CMP9 to the Kyoto Protocol, 22 November 2013**

Justice and peace must prevail: We must not betray life!

Mr President, His Excellency Marcin Korolec,
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"Blessed are the peace-makers, for they will be called children of God" Mathew 5:9

Five years ago while at COP14-CMP4 that took place in this same country, Poland, the World Council of Churches as well as the ecumenical family stressed the urgency to adopt more radical steps to cope with climate change. Climate change is not one more issue to be added to the list of points to worry about. Maybe it is the most urgent issue that humankind is facing at present. Climate change is happening now!

We are receiving formidable messages from nature telling us to wake up and make the transition to a more ethical society based on justice, equity and sustainability without more dilation.

Life is the most precious gift given to human beings. Life is beautiful, and the beauty of the natural world cannot be compared by anything created by the human genius. But what is human life if it cannot be lived in full dignity? How would our future be if there were no pure fresh water, clean breathable air, green forests and blue oceans to absorb and purify the atmosphere from the polluting carbon dioxide?

We fully know what causes climate change and we know how to at least ameliorate the damage. We must have ambitious goals while at the same time manage its consequences for as long as it takes to minimize the threat.

Just a few weeks before COP19-CMP9, leading climate scientists have once more warned the world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for the first time unfold how much more carbon dioxide humans can introduce into the atmosphere without triggering critical levels of climate change.

They clearly state that to hold warming to2ºC, total emissions cannot exceed1,000 gigatons of carbon dioxide and moreover they alert us that by 2011more than half of that total allotment had already been emitted!

Life in all its forms must be kept enjoying the perfect natural equilibrium of the natural world, which has its own laws and rhythm. Contemporary life is menaced by factors unknown in

past centuries: today we speak of food insecurity, of water insecurity, of energy insecurity. Is this the scenario we are preparing for the generations to come? Is this the world we shall leave to our descendants? Are we so isolated from the present reality, from the menace of peoples whose territory will disappear under the oceans' waters, whose habitat will be not only jeopardised but ultimately destroyed by the advancing desertification? Shall all the remaining species disappear leaving the world we live in without its rich and life-sustaining biodiversity?

Human beings have started a war against the natural world, against its waters, its natural resources, and its atmosphere, the latter having been named our "*global commons*" in past years. We are already in war against other human communities; we have started a war against our planet earth, which will end in the destruction of all forms of life, starting with the degradation and lack of dignity in the life of human societies. And we are still ins earch of a sustainable world, turning apart our faces, hearts and minds, not accepting the reality we are immersed in.

The World Council of Churches believes that all people are created equal and have the same rights to benefit from the bounties of creation. Equitable development for all is possible while maintaining the ecological integrity of the biosphere.

Justice and peace are needed: we must not remain unmoved to the pain, to the loneliness, to the injustice, and to the effects of the war against nature, without having done the utmost to save innocent people around our beautiful world from the consequences of our present indifference to the future.

This is what we, people of faith, people of firm convictions, have been claiming from you in your capacity as International Negotiators, in all the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change since Berlin in 1995.

The 10thAssembly of the World Council of Churches, which met in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, fervently "*Calls upon churches and ecumenical organizations to insist that governments look beyond national interests in order to be responsible towards the creation and our common future, and particularly those present at COP19 in Warsaw, Poland, to urge the Polish COP presidency to increase the ambitions of the Warsaw outputs*."

Do not deceive us, do not deceive yourselves and your families, and do not deceive the world of the future:

Act and act now!
The future is here, the future is today.
The world cannot wait: climate change is happening
Justice and peace must prevail: We must not betray life!

Water

- **Statement issued by participants of the Ecumenical Water Network, with strategies to address the issue of rights of communities to water and sanitation in Asia, 28 November – 3 December 2010**

Preamble
People from the churches and water activists from 12 countries in Asia gathered in Quezon City, Philippines from 28 November to 03 December 2010 to participate in the regional consultation on "Communities' right to water and sanitation in Asia" held under the auspices of the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) supported by the World Council of Churches.

Water is life and the right to water is the right to life. Today, however, approximately 1.1 billion people all over the world, the majority of whom live in Asia, are denied the right to clean and adequate water and sanitation; 2 million people die every year of diseases caused by poor water and sanitation. Water scarcity adversely affects the impoverished and marginalized most, especially women and Indigenous Peoples, posing a dire threat to their livelihoods, health and very existence.

In response to the intensifying water crisis, the EWN, composed of churches and church-related organizations, continues to work for the preservation, responsible management and equitable distribution of safe water for all. The EWN regional consultation in Quezon City was convened to: identify key challenges in Asia in promoting "Just Water"; increase Asian churches' commitment in the form of individual and joint action to meet these challenges, learning from past and present initiatives; build effective relationships between churches, regionally and internationally, with the aim of deepening and scaling up actions.

The Asian context
We learned from community visits and exchanges of country experiences that the water crisis in Asia, as elsewhere, is rooted in the pursuit of a growth- and profit-oriented development paradigm characterized by economic globalization, intensive urbanization and indiscriminate use, exploitation and mismanagement of water resources. The crisis is further aggravated by climate change.

The Asian peoples' struggle for adequate and safe water is a struggle for human dignity, human rights, gender equity and democracy. In Asia, the crisis has reached such proportions that conflict between human beings and between human beings and nature has become inevitable.

The right of the people to adequate and safe water is paid insufficient attention by decision-makers, who tend to respond with short-term and self-serving measures giving priority to power generation and industry, which are more profitable. The failure to properly regulate the management and distribution of safe water by governments results in the poor being denied this fundamental right. This is further exacerbated by privatization of this rapidly depleting but valuable and precious resource, thus depriving those who are economically disadvantaged from having access to it. This deprivation is a denial of the right to life and leads to death and destruction.

Recognitions and commitments
As participants in this consultation, we wish to restate our commitment to formulating different strategies to address the issue of rights of communities to water and sanitation in Asia:

WE RECOGNIZE AND EMPHASIZE

- the urgent need for global ecumenical cooperation for effective strategizing and implementation of water justice initiatives;
- the imperatives of alliance building and networking at national, regional and global levels for water justice and rights;
- the need to learn from each other about best practices and models of implementation;
- the importance of developing scientific and technological mechanisms for practical and sustainable alternatives in seeking to resolve the water crisis, to reduce waste and pollution;
- the need for effective dissemination of information, knowledge, initiatives and experiences in the empowerment of communities adversely impacted by the water crisis.

EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE INITIATIVES OF CHURCHES AND THEIR PARTNERS TO

- develop a strong theological perspective of water justice within the spectrum of integrity of creation, seeing creation as the primary revelation of God; reaffirming earth's rights along with human rights to water and sanitation
- actively engage in, educate, organize and mobilize our members and communities to be responsible citizens of God's creation;
- explore appropriate and creative avenues to build capacity in the fight against the forces which deprive poor and marginalized people of their human right to water and sanitation over generations;
- work towards conscientizing and requiring national governments and corporate entities to be governed by respect for and considerations of responsible and sustainable development in their long term business initiatives (especially industries involved in mining, generation of power, etc.) in the Asian regions which are rich in biodiversity, including water, so as to ensure inter-generational justice;
- facilitate the compilation of cases of violation and issues affecting communities' rights to safe and adequate water and sanitation, and develop campaigns around these cases;
- create awareness, assist the monitoring of and actively engage in advocacy and campaigning for the rights of persons and communities;
- harness energy and enthusiasm in such campaigns, especially of the youth within and outside the churches;
- call for accountability, transparency and responsible use of global communitarian resources like water and biodiversity by all stakeholders;
- seek equitable decision-making processes with strong and effective participation of the local communities and their active involvement in realizing their right to safe and adequate water and sanitation through sustainable development;
- participate in a variety of people's and civil society forums that genuinely address the issue of water comprehensively;
- provide legal expertise to help communities in the fight against the commodification of water resources;

- encourage the promotion of traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices to preserve , conserve and replenish natural water sources that are vulnerable to extinction;
- enrich our work using various creative and popular forms of education and advocacy that are deeply rooted in the Asian context;
- develop a gender perspective on water issues.

We carry back with us the commitment to the promotion and achievement of the initiatives enumerated above in keeping with our calling and particular contexts.

2 December 2010, Quezon City, Philippines

- ## Statement of the WCC Ecumenical Water Network adopted at their strategic consultation, Berlin, Germany, 10-12 June 2013

God, lead us to abundant life and peace through water justice:statement of the Ecumenical Water Network, World Council of Churches

This statement reflects the fruits of discussions among participants at the Strategic Consultation of the Ecumenical Water Network held in Berlin, Germany on 10-12 June 2013, which strategized towards "universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation". These discussions took place as Central Europe experienced floods of unprecedented magnitude, killing many, disrupting the lives of millions, destroying homes and businesses, with damages estimated to be in excess of 15 billion Euros.[8] This reiterates the nexus between water and climate change, which needs to be addressed urgently.

A. Water from the perspective of faith

Water has been present on Earth since the beginning of Creation. The first page of the Hebrew Scriptures avows that at the beginning, the Spirit hovered over the waters (Genesis 1, 1), while on the last page of the Christian Scriptures, the river of the water of life flows from the throne of God (Revelation 22, 1). God has provided us with beautiful pristine fresh waters that fall as rain, spring forth from the earth, lay low in the earth as groundwater, and gather together in streams and rivers.

Water is essential for the life of every creature. Human beings and other creatures mostly consist of water. And so, as Exodus recounts, the very life of the people wandering in the desert, from Egypt to the Promised Land, depended on Moses to find water. (Exodus 17,1).

Water is central to our spiritual life.Our Christian faith tradition proclaims the saving power of water, recognizing sacred power in the cleansing water of baptism. Baptism is also the visible sign of our belonging to the church, following the example of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3, 13). Again and again our Scriptures describe the precious genuine life found in following Jesus as living waters. People of many other faith traditions also celebrate the life-giving power of water.

Because water is truly the source of life, it requires responsible action from us as human beings: action to preserve and share water for the benefit of all creatures, as the "Statement on

[8]*Financial Times*, "Central Europeans prepare for the next flood of the century" (14 June 2013). http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/6b190cc4-d4d3-11e2-b4d7-00144feab7de.html#axzz2WFsnf8PZ

water for life"of the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches proclaims.[9]

B. The realities of our world reflect injustice and violent conflicts around water

A. Confessing our irresponsible behaviour towards God's gift of water

We are all people of the water, utterly dependent upon this gift of creation to drink, grow our crops, water our livestock, power our mills and homes, enable our enterprises, and provide habitat for fish and other aquatic creatures. But we humans have treated God's gift of water irresponsibly.

We have altered the climate of the earth and transformed the nature of the rains: areas with two rainy seasons now experience just one, rainy seasons shrink from months to days, or turn from times of blessed rains to times of unrelenting and increasingly ferocious typhoons and hurricanes, drought conditions often persist decade after decade, and hundred year floods appear several times in a single decade. As a result, we suffer: our crops wither, our homes and fields are swept away by floods, landslides, or fierce winds and we die.

We have consumed water too greedily and wasted water. We waste water in cities using clean water to grow thirsty exotic plants, wash sidewalks and cars, and flush toilets. In the midst of water scarcity in rural areas, we waste water by drilling wells for tourist attractions and resort homes that steal water from our rivers, and irrigating crops better grown in areas with plentiful water. We waste water to make products at great cost and with minimal benefit for local communities. For example, in many places, drinking water wells have ceased to function due to declines in the water table. Often these declines are caused by enormous, unsustainable withdrawals of water made by factories or farms owned by transnational corporations to produce products like biofuel or bottled water.

We have failed to share water equitably and wisely. Often only those who live in the most prosperous countries and the richest of those in other countries have clean water to drink. Often only the wealthy and transnational corporations have access to water necessary to irrigate crops and water livestock, while small and subsistence farmers have none. Often we do not leave enough water in streams and rivers to support fish, wildlife, and the ecosystems upon which all God's creatures rely.

We have contaminated water, transforming it from a life-giving substance to a death-dealing hazard, for both humanity and the rest of God's creatures. Fertilizers and pesticides employed by commercial agriculture, heavy metals from mining, and extremely toxic, persistent chemicals from industries pollute lakes, rivers, basins and aquifers. This pollution of our precious waters destroys aquatic ecosystems, kills fish and other aquatic creatures, renders fish too dangerous to eat, and leaves water too toxic for drinking, bathing, or other purposes.

We have made opportunistic attempts to capitalize on water scarcity. When private profit drives decision-making, trans-national corporations and other private actors seek to benefit from water scarcity, whether by privatizing municipal water service provision, by obtaining vast tracks of land simply to secure exclusive rights to water, or by selling bottled water at hundreds of times the real cost. By these practices, we turn water from being a gift of God into a mere commodity sold to the highest bidder. This violates the fundamental nature of

[9] World Council of Churches, 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February, 2006, *Statement on Water for Life* (23 February 2006). http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/human-rights-and-impunity/statement-on-water-for-life

water as a common good that ought to remain in public ownership and be controlled by our communities, for the benefit of all within the community, particularly the most vulnerable. Private ownership or management of water is inappropriate where our governments lack the capacity or the will to regulate private actors effectively or to assure that the human right to water and sanitation is realized. When we waste water just to make a profit, exploit water by selling it at excessive prices, or grab land just to acquire water rights, we abuse God's gift of water.

We in the church have failed to fulfil fully our responsibility to care for this critical element of God's creation. We do not consistently treat water respectfully and educate our congregations about proper use of water. We seldom place saving millions of lives through the provision of clean water, sanitation and health education at the centre of our mission responses. We fail too often to raise our prophetic voice on behalf of water justice.

B. All Creation groans from human irresponsibility and ignorance

When we act irresponsibly towards water, all creation groans, for human beings and the rest of God's creatures endure needless suffering, and many die.

When drinking water becomes scarce, our women, children and elders spend hours, even days, walking and waiting to secure the water necessary to sustain life. They sacrifice precious time and energy that might otherwise be spent on school, farming, and other enterprises to lift their families out of extreme, soul-deadening poverty.

When drinking water becomes contaminated, we suffer from preventable diseases as common and easily treated as diarrhoea and as swiftly and frequently deadly as cholera. It is a sad reality of our world that several billion people, mostly poor or people marginalized within their societies, lack access to clean water, adequate sanitation, or the knowledge necessary to protect their health from the ravages of water-borne diseases.

When sanitation is not available, there is nowhere for us to defecate but on the street or in the field. We are stripped of our privacy and dignity. Young women are discouraged from attending school. We are exposed to viruses, bacteria, and intestinal parasites that sap our energy, deprive us of nutrition by stealing the benefit of our food, sicken us, and all too often kill us. And inadequate sanitation pollutes the very water we depend upon for life.

Together, dirty water, inadequate sanitation, and ignorance of basic hygiene combine to cause almost 10% of all the illnesses experienced by human beings and to kill up to 3 million people each year,[10] most of them children under the age of 5.[11]

Our irresponsibility towards water has other catastrophic consequences. Failure to share water equitably and wisely creates extreme hardships for the most vulnerable of God's children and destroys the integrity of God's creation. When water is scarce and not equitably

[10]The World Health Organization estimated that safe drinking water and adequate sanitation could save 1.8 million deaths from diarrhea and almost 900,000 deaths from malnutrition each year. They would also prevent other seriously damaging illnesses, such as intestinal parasites, lymphatic filariasis, trachoma, and schistosomiasis, which affect 2.3 billion people each year. World Health Organization, *How Does Safe Water Affect Global Health?* (25 June 2008). http://www.who.int/features/qa/70/en/index.html. (15 June 2013); World Health Organization, *Safer water, better health: costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health* (2008). http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596435_eng.pdf. (15 June 2013). (2008).

[11]90% of deaths caused by diarrheal diseases are children under 5 years old, mostly in developing countries. UN Water, *Tackling a global crisis: International Year of Sanitation (2008).*

allocated, conflict then tears our communities apart and creates animosity, even war, between communities, disturbing God's shalom.

C. *A critical aspect of water justice: efforts to realize the human right to water and sanitation*

Realizing the human right of universal access to clean water and adequate sanitation involves construction, operation, and maintenance of expensive infrastructure. We cannot achieve this aspect of water justice without national governments and the international community directing a much greater percentage of development funding toward water and sanitation. Ironically, although the ongoing costs of dirty water and inadequate sanitation are almost ten times as much as the cost of this infrastructure,[12] progress on this front has been halting.

Fortunately, clean water and sanitation are such critical components of human development that the United Nations focused on them in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the goals that the UN, other international organization, and its member nations sought to achieve by 2015. Throughout the world, national governments committed at the turn of the 21st century to build the infrastructure necessary to provide safe drinking water and basic sanitation, adopting that as MDG Goal 7. Goal 7 (c) seeks to cut the percentage of people without safe drinking water from 24% in 1990 to 11% by 2015 and the percentage of people without basic sanitation from 51% in 1990 to 25.5% by 2015.[13] The UN has recently proclaimed that we have met the MDG goal for water,[14] though it concedes that progress on the sanitation goal is further behind than any other development goal.[15]

Unfortunately, less progress has been made on meeting Goal 7 (c) or towards eventually achieving universal access to clean water and adequate sanitation than the UN's statements might suggest.As the UN's Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) recognizes, the existing Goal 7 (c) provides an inadequate measure of progress because the critical characteristics of "safe" drinking water are neither defined, nor monitored, in measuring progress toward this goal.[16]

---

[12] World Health Organization, *Safer water, better health: costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health* (2008). http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596435_eng.pdf. (15 June 2013). (2008). Another estimate is that lack of clean water and adequate sanitation cost US $ 260 billion each year, while the total cost of meeting Goal 7 will require a total of US$145 billion and achieving universal access will require an additional US$565 billion, for a total of just over US$700 billion. Comparing the benefit of providing clean water and adequate sanitation of more than US $7 trillion (assuming a facility life of 30 years) to the total cost of roughly US $700 billion, the benefit cost ratio approaches 10. The exact benefit-cost ratio depends upon a series of assumptions about the time value of money, the value of life, facility life, and other factors. The benefit-cost ratios of various aspect of water and sanitation provision calculated by WHO range from 50:1 to less than 1. World Health Organization, *Global costs and benefits of drinking-water supply and sanitation interventions to reach the MDG target and universal coverage* (2012).
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/75140/1/WHO_HSE_WSH_12.01_eng.pdf, (15 June 2013).

[13]United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2012* (2012).
http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202012.pdf#page=53 (15 June 2013).

[14] "The MDG drinking water target, which calls for halving the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water between 1990 and 2015, was met in 2010, five years ahead of schedule." World Health Organization and UNICEF, Joint Monitoring Programme, *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation: 2012 Update* (2012). http://www.wssinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/JMP-report-2012-en.pdf (15 June 2013).

[15]United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2012* (2012).
http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202012.pdf#page=53 (15 June 2013).

[16] World Health Organization and UNICEF, Joint Monitoring Programme, *Progress on Sanitation and Drinking-Water: 2013 Update* (2013). http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/81245/1/9789241505390_eng.pdf. 768 million people lack access to an improved source of water and 2.5 million people lack access to an improved sanitation. World Health Organization, *Data on MGD 7: Water and Sanitation*.
http://www.who.int/gho/mdg/environmental_sustainability/en/index.html. (15 June 2013). Far more people lack access to clean water and sanitation because "improved" does not necessarily imply access to clean water or adequate sanitation. For example, residential and community taps that deliver non-potable and potentially deadly water nonetheless qualify as "improved." The special rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation stated in her 2011 annual report that a recent study found that 57% of protected wells and 11% of utility water taps have bacteria contamination. UN General Assembly,

Overall, the goal and the monitoring of progress failed to assure the benefits of increased access, because:

- Poor people living in informal settlements and remote rural areas are not necessarily counted in national statistics
- Water quality and quantity are not always sufficient for drinking and other personal uses
- Infrastructure and service provision have not been delivered in a sustainable manner
- Water, sanitation, and hygiene have not been provided concurrently
- Poor and marginalized people have been ignored in the provision of services
- National, regional and global averages have obscured the lack of progress, and the continued desperate situation, of rural, poor, and marginalized people in many nations, especially lesser developed countries.

The human right to water and sanitation is now recognized and embedded in international law through treaties and through the 2010 actions of the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council.[17]The internationally recognized human right to water and sanitation "entitleseveryoneto sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses."[18] And virtually every nation in the world is legally required to respect, protect, and take concrete actions to progressively realize that right.

As the deadline to meet Goal 7 (c) approaches in 2015 and we are collectively setting a new international goal for water and sanitation, we must seek to achieve universal access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation as rapidly as possible, defining the new goal in a way that better captures our intent and is more consistent with the human right to water and sanitation, and the obligations of governments to fulfil that right.

Statement by the special rapporteur on the right to access to safe drinking water and sanitation at the 66th Session of the General Assembly (24 October 2011).

(http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11542&LangID=E. (15 June 2013). As the World Health Organization and UNICEF recognize "For monitoring purposes, the use of improved drinking water sources has been equated to access to safe drinking water, but not all improved sources in actual fact provide drinking water that is safe." World Health Organization and UNICEF, Joint Monitoring Programme, *Progress on Sanitation and Drinking- Water: 2010 Update* (2010).

http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241563956_eng_full_text.pdf. (15 June 2013). WHO recently expended upon the limitations of its figures, noting: "Since it is not yet possible to measure water quality globally, dimensions of safety, reliability and sustainability are not reflected in the proxy indicator used to track progress towards the MDG target. As a result, it is likely that the number of people using improved water sources is an overestimate of the actual number of people using safe water supplies. Continued efforts are required to promote global monitoring of drinking water safety, reliability and sustainability and to move beyond the MDG water target to universal coverage." United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2012* (2012).

http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202012.pdf#page=53 (15 June 2013). The Report of the High Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda noted that 2 billion people do not have continuous access to safe drinking water: "Around two billion people lack access to continuous, safe water. Improving access – as well as quality – is becoming more urgent as the world faces increasing water scarcity." United Nations High Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda Report, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development* (2013).

http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf. (15 June 2013).

[17] United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 64/292. The human right to water and sanitation* (28 July 2010) http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/292; United Nations Human Rights Council, *Human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation* (24 September 2010).

[18] United Nations Economic and Social Council , *SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES ARISING IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)General Comment No. 15* (20 January 2003).

The post-2015 development goals must place an extremely high priority on providing water, sanitation and hygiene to the poor and other marginalized groups. Ironically, the poor have not benefitted much from the progress on the MDGs, even though development efforts are supposed to be aimed at alleviating poverty. The report of UN special rapporteur of human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, provides strong evidence that the poor and other marginalized groups have been discriminated against with respect to water and sanitation. Reports of the Joint Monitoring Programme, summarized in the 2012 update, underscore that rural communities, those in the lower quintiles of wealth, and those in the least developed countries continue to have substantially less access to water and sanitation.
The post 2015 goals must articulate a necessary preference for poor and other marginalized peoples. The goals for rural residents, the poor and other marginalized people must reflect affordability, sustainability, and supply drinking water of sufficient quantity and adequate quality, as measured by specific indicators, to meet the human right to water and sanitation of these systematically disadvantaged groups. Specific recommendations on the post-2015 development agenda by the EWN on behalf of the church are included below.

D. The role of the church in creating a new reality of water justice

A. *The work of the Ecumenical Water Network*

Both historically and today, the church has built or funded a great number of community-based water and sanitation projects in developing countries. But advocacy efforts on water justice have lagged behind. This situation changed with the founding of the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN).

Based on theological reflection on how we should in faith respond to the crises caused by water injustice, churches and other faith based organizations have come together to effectively respond to water issues through the EWN. Since the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, when churches were called to join the network, a significant number of churches, regional ecumenical organizations and other ecumenical partners have joined efforts to protect water and advocate for the human right to water and sanitation. Inspired by the struggle of communities all over the world, by reflecting and strategizing together in consultations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the EWN has become a concrete instrument of water justice. Hosted by the World Council of Churches, EWN has provided a space to share stories on the involvement of churches in water issues, to develop educational and worship resources on water and sanitation, and to catalyze the advocacy work of the churches on human right to water and sanitation.

The EWN, its participants, and its partners and allies in civil society played a significant role in securing the appointment of the Independent Expert (now special rapporteur) on the human right to water and sanitation. Her work, together with the advocacy efforts of the EWN, participants, partners, and allies, was crucial in securing the recognition of the human right to water and sanitation by the United Nations General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council in 2010. Much has been accomplished, but much remains to be done. Our efforts to seek recognition of the human right to water and sanitation must now be followed by efforts to assure that "right" is fully implemented and appropriately monitored by national governments, and progress to realize that right for the poor and other marginalized groups is made swiftly, so our vision of clean water and adequate sanitation for all becomes a new reality.

B. God calls the church to intensify its efforts to realize water justice

Water is so critical to life that we can hardly call ourselves followers of Christ without focusing our most strenuous mission and witness efforts towards achieving water justice. Indeed, Jesus taught that only those who gave food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty could be considered his followers. (Matthew 25, 34). So we must undertake our role as the body of Christ, as God's hands and feet in the world, with unprecedented zeal. Achieving water justice must be among the highest priorities on the agenda of every national church, congregation, and Christian organization. We in the church are called by God to use our unique voice to help create the kingdom of God here on earth and, without water justice, the kingdom remains incredibly distant in the face of needless suffering and death for so many of God's children and the destruction of the integrity of God's creation.

C. Critical roles of the church in achieving water justice

The church has certain critical roles and responsibilities in achieving water justice:

1. The church engages and educates our congregations and communities on the spiritual and ethical values of water as well as our Christian responsibilities to treat water respectfully and to seek water justice.

2. The church seeks to be responsible in our use of water in our places of worship and in our daily lives, and by setting such an example, we place a light on the lampstand for all to see. (Mark 4, 21).

3. The church funds and carries out projects to provide clean water, sanitation, and hygiene education, including actions to prevent water pollution. Although national governments bear the responsibility for fulfilling the human right to water and sanitation, we know that government actions take time and fall short. So, as an expression of Christian love, we take direct action to improve access to clean water and adequate sanitation.

4. The church raises a prophetic voice of faith in support of water justice.

    - We seek to assure that our resources and those of governments are devoted first towards providing water and sanitation to the most vulnerable populations, the poor and others stigmatized and marginalized by our societies, from the Romas and Dalits to the physically challenged. (Isaiah 1, 17; Amos 5, 24)[19]
    - We seek to assure decisions made on water and sanitation protect all of God's creation.
    - As we pursue water justice, we seek to encourage engagement by, and highlight the powerful witness of, those especially affected by unjust and irresponsible behaviour towards water, including women and young people.

5. As we work, the church remembers that water justice is a concern not only for Christians.

[19] Report of the special rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, *Stigma and the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation* (2 July 2012) http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/148/98/PDF/G1214898.pdf?OpenElement.

Knowing that many hands make light work, we participate in and treasure truly collaborative partnerships with our allies in civil society and other faith traditions, with a firm and enduring hope that, together, we can change the world and achieve water justice through our collective efforts.

D. A call to public and private actors to recognize the church's vital interest in water and sanitation

Because of the historical role of the church in water and sanitation, and because of the critical roles that the church plays in achieving water justice, all who deal with water issues should recognize that the church is a significant stakeholder in these matters. We hope that all actors in the water arena will recognize that it is crucial to include the church in stakeholder discussions at every level.

E. Specific recommendations

A. **The church at all levels (international, national, and local) must immediately seek to reorient the post-2015 development agenda:**

1. *The international community and national governments must make firm commitments to provide universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities as part of the post-2015 development agenda.*

2. *Those commitments should include early goals for access by rural residents, the poor and other marginalized groups to address their unacceptably low level of access to water and sanitation.*

   The international community and national governments should commit to provide universal access by the poor and other marginalized groups to adequate safe, drinking water supply, hand-washing and sanitation facilities at home by 2030. These goals are necessary to address the asymmetries and inequalities that plague provision of water and sanitation, with some groups being inadvertently or deliberately excluded from access to water and sanitation. The goals for rural residents, the poor and other marginalized groups must reflect affordability, sustainability, and supply drinking water of sufficient quantity and adequate quality, as measured by specific indicators, to meet the human right to water and sanitation of these systematically disadvantaged groups.

3. *Those commitments should include the features necessary to secure the benefits of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. These features include:*

   a. *Access for all residents, including refugees and other excluded communities.*

   b. *Access to affordable, relatively continuous, and sustainable services, as measured by specific indicators.*

   c. *Access to safe drinking water in sufficient quantity and quality to meet drinking and other personal needs to be safe (initially as measured by the JMP proposed definitions for "intermediate" access).*

   d. *Access to drinking water at home with a collection time of 30 minutes or less per person.*

   e. *Access to hand-washing and menstrual hygiene facilities as well as hygiene education.*

f. Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services concurrently to the greatest extent feasible to realize the maximum benefits of those services.

4. The commitments of national governments and the international community with respect to water should include strong goals regarding eliminating groundwater mining, improving water efficiency by all sectors, recycling water, balancing water supply and demand, safe management and disposal of excreta, treating wastewater so that surface waters are safe for humans, fish, and other aquatic creatures and can be rendered drinkable with minimal treatment.

B. **The church at all levels must continue to develop its understanding of water justice.** One critical aspect of developing our understanding is sharing stories – as EWN has and will continue to do through consultations and workshops, including those at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Another aspect is developing a deeper understanding of the spiritual and ethical values underlying and defining water justice.

C. **The church at all levels must discern and express its own voice to serve as a catalyst** for creating an inspiring and shared vision of water justice in the social domain. We should seek to raise awareness of water justice issues throughout society.

D. **The church at all levels must raise our prophetic voice to encourage actions consistent with water justice**, including strong and persistent advocacy for full realization of the human right to water and other aspects of water justice. We should lift up the voices of those especially affected by water injustice, including women, youth, the poor, and other marginalized groups. We should also seek to assure that all Creation is cared for in actions related to water.

E. **The church at all levels must increase its support for and funding of community-based water and sanitation projects,** to ensure that communities secure clean water and adequate sanitation as rapidly and reliably as possible.

F. **As the church seeks water justice, we should create collaborative partnerships with our allies in civil society and other faith traditions.** We do so in the confident hope that, together, with God's help, we can indeed change the reality of our world from injustice to justice, and bring the Kingdom of God closer to earth.

Participants of the strategic consultation of Ecumenical Water Network

Health

- **Joint statement, co-signed by WCC general secretary, from the summit of high-level religious leaders on HIV and AIDS, 23 March 2010**

Together we must do more

My personal commitment to action
As a religious leader, I am convinced that my faith must be more visible and active to halt the spread of HIV and reverse this pandemic.

For three decades now, HIV has continued to spread across all levels of our societies. Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV continues to fuel ignorance, injustice, denial and hate. At this critical point in the epidemic, I need to be clear in my words and actions that stigma and discrimination towards people living with or affected by HIV is unacceptable.

Fundamental to my faith is the respect for human dignity and the value of human life. Such respect and value is central to my response to HIV.

Therefore, I commit to exercising stronger, more visible, and practical leadership in the response to the HIV pandemic – increasing commitment, deepening meaningful engagement with people living with HIV, and acting decisively to protect human rights within my faith community; through collaboration among other religious leaders of different faiths; and by influencing local, national, regional and global decision-making processes on HIV.

Conscious of the specific needs of all those affected by HIV, this leadership means…

To people living with HIV, I commit myself to:

- working tirelessly to end all stigmatizing attitudes and actions until people living with HIV are fully included in our religious communities and societies;
- supporting concerted efforts and partnerships to provide support including health care and education in ways that respect privacy and dignity;
- seeking to understand and respond to the specific needs and situations of different communities affected by HIV to enable all people living with HIV to participate fully in society;
- providing spiritual support and resources to give hope and enable positive living, assuring you that HIV cannot separate you from love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness.

To children, I commit to:

- Recognizing your rights, including health, education and support, that will help you celebrate childhood and learn values and ethical practices for safer and healthier living.

To young people, I commit to:

- Listening to your needs and empowering you with the values and support to help protect you from violence and suppression and from behaviours that create risks for yourself and others;
- Enabling and facilitating your leadership and participation.

To women and girls, I commit to:

- Recognizing your special vulnerability and roles as caregivers and mothers and working tirelessly to ensure you have the services you require for prevention, treatment, care and support.
- Exercising respect and challenging any oppressive systems of power within my religious community and society which fuel violence and injustice;
- Providing space for your voice and leadership in our communities.

To men and boys, I commit to:

- Encouraging understanding of power that allows people to relate to one another with dignity and love.
- Supporting leadership and decision-making that addresses the root causes of HIV.

To my religious community, I commit to:

- Doing all I can to break the barriers of silence and exclusion to fully and openly include people living with HIV and their families in our religious communities;
- Leading by example and encouraging my religious community to deepen its engagement in the response to HIV, including advocating for prevention, treatment, care and support for all.

To networks, organizations and public institutions, I commit to:

- Fully supporting all efforts to extend services and support that will enable an HIV-free generation by 2015;
- Challenging and supporting governments to meet their moral duty to implement their promises on HIV in their priorities, practices and financial support.
- partnering with you to combine our experiences, approaches and expertise to reach our common goal of halting the spread of HIV and reversing the pandemic.

To those I am addressing in this pledge and to other religious leaders who join me in this covenant/pledge, I commit to:

- reporting through available channels every 18 months[20] how I have worked to fulfil my pledge.

- **Declaration made at the South African regional consultation on "Healing of memories: reconciliation between people, cultures and religion", Cape Town, South Africa, 11 September 2010**

[20] This would be: September 2011, March 2013 and September 2014.

(A cooperative process that was co-hosted by All Africa Conference of Churches, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation & the Institute of Healing of Memories)

The conference was convened in recognition of the need for healing and reconciliation in our broken world, a need that cannot be overemphasized. The pain and burden of memories of ongoing, recent and past conflicts haunt and hamper normal life and progress. The process for 'Healing of Memories' is designed to advocate for, develop and promote healing of memories and other healing and reconciliation processes in Churches and faith communities, so as to strengthen their role as channels of hope, healing and reconciliation in our world today.

The participants were predominantly representatives from Council of Churches in the Southern Africa Region: Namibia, Swaziland, Botswana, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Malawi and South Africa. Women and youth were represented and civil society organizations also participated.

Participants delivered country reports addressing the ancient, old and new wounds in their countries. Robust discussions about what has been done or not done to address these wounds on the continent took place. Presentations were also given on current issues, HIV/AIDS, xenophobia and restitution. The common thread throughout the conference was the role of religion in conflict and healing.

After rigorous dialogue the conference developed a common vision for implementing "Healing of Memories" work in the Southern Africa region, taking into consideration both the common and unique issues in each country.

Issues raised

Common threads:

- Lack of acknowledgement of "multiple woundedness"
- Apartheid legacy on the sub-continent: many countries are still scarred from their involvement in the South African struggle
- HIV and AIDS pandemic
- A lot of superstition, ignorance, stigma and a need for education including amongst religious people around protective measures and ARV's
- Oppression: the liberators become the oppressors
- The enduring lack of self value that many black people in Southern Africa continue to feel in relation to white people
- The church needs to advocate for social change, economic justice and gender inclusivity
- The need for restitution and restorative justice is imperative for meaningful healing
- Corrupt politicians/corruption is endemic and does not exclude the church
- Massive economic disparity between those who have and those who do not have.
- Women continue to be marginalized
- Slavery, colonization, apartheid and all current economic injustices are the result of human greed
- Land tenure and ownership is a contentious issue through out Southern Africa
- Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and ethnic chauvinism are serious issues and are not fully addressed and are often among the root causes of violence.
- South African multinationals exploit other countries in the region

- South African weapons still fuel violence in the region
- Lack of platforms for healing ancient, old and new wounds
- Abuse relating to witch-hunting and allegations of witchcraft

Specific and unique issues:

- Absolute monarch in Swaziland
- The sinfulness of increasing attacks on and abuse of children accused of witchcraft in Malawi and Angola.
- Botswana is contributing towards the World Bank and is presenting itself as wealthy while 59% of its population is under the poverty datum line.

Vision :

Healed community where the healing of memories is implemented in a holistic, inclusive, acceptable and sustainable way.

Objectives:

- That healing of memories is of fundamental importance for building lasting peace in Southern Africa
- That civil society, churches, other religious groups, government and NGO's (CBO's, IBO'S etc.) need to unite to address the skeletons of our past
- Through working together we believe that we can heal our many ancient, old and new wounds and end cycles of retaliation and revenge
- Healing of memories can create new ways of living together harmoniously to benefit all people

Way forward:

Initially :

- Heads of delegations to take the matter forward and form a regional working group
- Healing of memories be institutionalized within the FOCCISA – the regional structure of the councils of churches of Southern Africa
- Popularizing of healing of memories in participating countries of the region
- Needs assessment for healing of memories interventions need to be formulated in each country
- Training of facilitators in each country

Secondly:

- To establish working groups using the latest communication technologies to share parallel issues and learn from each other
- Regional healing of memories workshops and training in each country, targeting political leaders, eminent/influential people, youth, civil society and religious communities
- Motivating for school curricula to include learning about ancient, old and new wounds and how to deal with their own emotions constructively
- Funding should be sourced and generated
- Networking and maintaining contact with participants and encouraging one another to continue on our own journeys of healing
- Documentation, recording of the history, monitoring and evaluation of the processes in the region

- Partnering with other universities and academic institutions in the region to develop recognized qualifications in healing of memories facilitation skills
- To develop models of healing that can be replicated elsewhere and shared in other regions

Adopted by acclamation, on 11th of September 2010.

• Statement on precautionary concern over organisms produced by synthetic DNA technology addressed to the chair of the United States of America Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues, 1 October 2010

Precautionary concern over organisms producedby synthetic DNA technology

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been involved in the discussion on ethical issues surrounding biotechnology since 1968 through conferences and publications. Publications have included "Genetics and the quality of life" (1975); "Manipulating life" (1981); and a report entitled "Biotechnology – its challenges to the churches and the world".

Different, synthesized DNA content, not a newly synthesized cell
The recent announcement of the development of an organizm with completely synthetically-engineered DNA deserves careful reflection and commentary. As noted by the Human Genetics Alert, the organizm constructed by researchers at the J. Craig Venter Institute is not a totally synthetic organizm as some claim. It is in reality a variation on a well-established technology known as somatic cell nuclear transfer that produced Dolly the sheep and other cloned organizms. Similar technology exists, in genetically modified organizms (GMO) plants in which a small number of genes are introduced into the nucleus of the recipient organizm. The difference in the case of this new synthetic organizm is that the nuclear DNA does not come from another organizm where DNA naturally occurs but rather is introduced as DNA synthesized by human researchers after the original natural DNA has been removed. With this newly synthesized DNA, instructions are given to the rest of the cell so that cell functions are reprogrammed according to instructions given by the new DNA. This newly programmed cell can multiply and produce large numbers of identical or cloned cells, qualifying it as a living organizm.

Some major ethical concerns
The basic ethical issues associated with this discovery are similar to those linked to other scientific research. These include:

1. How will this new biotechnology be applied and further developed for the benefit or detriment of the humankind and the world around us? As currently conceived, synthetic biology is really the bioengineering of existing biological structures or the attempt to create novel biological systems. The direction of such research can be driven by motives that seek to better the human condition and that of our environment or by motives designed to gain power and control over other human beings and the environment for personal gain. This is not new in bioethics but adds a new level of concern and complexity in a society that has been able to define and agree on common goods that responsibly serve to preserve and enrich the created order and to join with scientists to direct new technologies for the betterment of each citizen.

2. Will commercial interests lead to its misuse for the gain of power over others or for financial gain with adverse consequences on humankind and/or the environment? Currently, the development of this field of biotechnologies is being driven largely by research with commercial targets and interests in conjunction with large multinational corporations. Setting research direction and priorities to primarily, or at least substantially, improve the human and environmental condition must be better implemented by societal leaders and regulatory authorities.

3. Will this technology divert research resources away from needy projects that have clearly demonstrated human betterment? Many humanitarian projects involving the most needy and vulnerable in our global village lack sufficient funding, yet benefit many fellow human beings at relatively little cost. Such projects include preventative health measures such as vaccine development, public health interventions such as clean water sources, and public education have been shown to be efficient uses of resources to serve the needy. In short, who is evaluating whether this type of research is receiving excessive funding relative to the research priorities for the needs of the majority of human beings on this planet? In addition, development of new or genetically transformed organizms for good purposes must be thought through carefully. For example, creating genetically novel algae that might be used to biodegrade oil pollution from oil spills should not be funded without appropriate attention to and funding of measures to prevent such spills in the first place.

4. What measures are being taken by public regulatory authorities, whose mandate is to protect the public, to contain and regulate the application new organizm species that are produced in the laboratory? Producers of novel synthetic organizms must be held accountable for their use including the tracing of the location of such organizms, development of containment strategies, and prospective studies to determine the short and long-term implications of their application on human beings and the environment?

5. There should be discussions and regulatory mechanisms set up among representatives of different segments of society to study the societal needs for synthetic biology, how those needs might be met, and what measures should be taken to ensure their safe application with minimal risk to human beings and the environment. Sociological, health, economic, and other needs of different groups within society need to be identified and those groups should provide input and have a stake in decisions that affect their welfare and that of others. The public good including preservation and enrichment of the created world order needs to be mutually understood and kept in mind through such processes of synthetic biology development and implementation.

Precedents for reflection and learning in considering the risks in applying synthetic biology products to societal needs

We have seen the damage done to the disruption of natural bio-diversity by techologies in the areas such as agriculture. For example, GMO genetic material has contaminated the genome of crops located at far distances from the planted crop despite statements that genetic contamination could be controlled through the use of proper distances between crops. Clearly, the risk of something similar happening again with new technologies involving synthetic biology is real to the point that it may soon become possible to completely replacement the genomes of current plant species with untold short and long-term consequences. Furthermore, aggressive expansion of the GMO-soybean technology in Latin America promoted by large agribusinesseshas caused sociological and economic degradation of indigenous and small farming communities.

Uncontrolled human interventions such as chemical pesticides and other harmful products have already awakened human beings to the potentially destructive power of new technologies. Pesticides and genetically-modified living systems that are introduced prematurely for quick the financial gain of a few, without thorough and thoughtful consideration of applications and their consequences have created long-term serious toxic problems for entire communities. Given Institute director Craig Venter's claims that his patent application may eventually produce millions of new species per day, it is imperative that discussions of authoritative societal leaders begin now to study the goals and implications of development and introduction of such organizms into human society and the environment.

Summary and recommendation
Based on the above we urge governments and other societal authorities to quickly develop and implement strict regulations on the funding, development, and application of such new biotechnologies according to *the precautionary principle*. In addition, regulatory measures should be taken immediately to ensure the adequate tracking of synthetic biological constructs imported from other countries and their labelling for consumers. Through this process of societal oversight, we strongly urge such authorities to exercise wise discernment that includes input for various segments of society when deciding on their research priorities and the funding that is provided.

Above all, rather than rushing to accept the development of unproven and potentially unsound technical novelties, priority should be given to restoring and maintaining the health of ecosystems for a sustainable earth suitable for the wellbeing and health of all within our developing global village. As Christians we believe that "…*God saw everything that he has made, and behold, it was very good*" (Gen.1:31). We believe that all of humankind has an ongoing responsibility to further discover, enrich, and preserve that goodness with the guidance of Scripture.

• Minute on strengthening the ecumenical response to HIV/AIDS adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011

Imitating Christ's humility
If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2: 1,2,5)

The three decades of living with HIV and AIDS in our world has been a journey of revelation of our vulnerabilities and strengths as communities, churches and as individuals. Even though the world has made great progress in care, prevention and treatment, there are more than 33 million people living with HIV in the world today. While currently there are more than five million people on HIV treatment, nearly 10 million people are waiting to receive treatment. And though the spread of the disease has slowed in many regions, in 2009 there were an estimated 2.6 million new HIV infections worldwide.

WCC started to work on HIV and AIDS 25 years ago and many member churches have made great strides in dealing with HIV in a holistic manner. It is the tenth year of service of the *Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa*, working with churches and faith communities in accompanying people living with HIV and in transforming the theological perspectives in

facing HIV and in striving to become compassionate and competent in confronting the root causes of the pandemic.

But the factors that make our communities vulnerable continue to challenge us. Poverty and inequity; violence and insecurity; broken relationships in families and communities; the low priority given to women and children in society; the inability to address the issues related to human sexuality and intravenous drug use; fragile livelihoods and lack of food security; lack of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, all contribute to this vulnerability. The decline in international and national investments in countering HIV and the inertia in mainstreaming HIV prevention, care and treatment into our daily life, threatens to undo the gains that have been made over the decades.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva 16-22 February 2011, calls the churches of the WCC to:

1. ***Remember***the millions of lives lost to AIDS and to continue to uphold their families and communities in prayer and action.

2. ***Acknowledge*** the ongoing work of churches and faith communities in accompanying all those among us who live with HIV and those affected by the impact of the pandemic and to praise God for the witness of those living positively with HIV.

3. ***Review*** the work we have done thus far in our own contexts and to fully participate, with civil society and governments in the UN General Assembly Comprehensive AIDS Review to be held in June 2011.

4. ***Renew*** our commitment to serve communities in light of the changing face of the pandemic and the transforming needs of all people affected by the disease, including:
   (a) children born with HIV approaching sexual maturity;
   (b) couples where one or both are living with HIV;
   (c) widows, widowers and orphans;
   (d) communities,

to ensure that universal access to prevention, care, support and treatment of HIV reach the millions who are yet to receive it.

5. ***Persevere*** in eliminating stigma and discrimination against those who are living with HIV and AIDS.

6. ***Strengthen*** the work of regional and national networks contributing to the ecumenical response to HIV, sharing good practises, experiences and resources.

7. ***Reaffirm*** our ecumenical commitment to 'Live the promise,' strengthening the campaign of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, working with civil society to measure up to our responsibility and embracing the vision of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 'Zero new infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS related deaths'.

Triune God, our healer and strength, we bring to you the pain of the world and those who live under the shadow of death due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Forgive us for our complacency and our failure to act sufficiently, and to hold those in power accountable. We pray that you help us to see the face of Christ in all who are living with HIV, to help and

support each other with compassion and love. We also pray that you grant us the grace and courage to make ourselves and our communities less vulnerable to HIV. Amen.

- ## Summary of oral interventions at the Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, 16-25 May 2011

Statement on agenda item 11: The future of financing for WHO
The current crisis, may compromise WHO's capacity to play a leading role in global health governance.

The scope of operations WHO could be reduced with 'mainstreaming' of important functions, thus opening new opportunities for private foundations, and corporations to influence the WHO agenda through the proposed World Health Forum. The decision-making process in WHO should remain with the member states and WHO should not be downgraded to a technocratic body, but continue to help bring about the critical determinants of health that are wholly encompassed in the WHO Constitution. To fulfil its mandate the WHO needs a budget that is adequate, predictable and untied. The growing imbalance between assessed and voluntary contributions undermines the organization's independence. We propose that member states collectively commit to increasing assessed funding so that it reaches 50% of the overall budget over the next five years, to help WHO be the independent body it needs to be to do its work.

Agenda item 13.8: Smallpox eradication: destruction of variola virus stocks.
This is a call for WHO to promptly destroy, once and for all, remaining stocks of smallpox (variola) virus. These viruses serve no essential public health purpose. The vaccine is made from vaccinia, a related but far less deadly virus. Six years ago, civil society and governments united in order to counter dangerous attempts to genetically engineer smallpox. This led to a deeper examination of the need to retain the virus stocks, culminating in a major review of smallpox virus research in 2010, which was presented this year. This review conducted by WHO experts concludes that no compelling reason remains to retain the virus samples. Furthermore, between 1976 and 1979 WHO, through its regional offices, ensured that all Member states had destroyed or transferred all remaining variola stocks to a WHO Collaborating Centre. Hundreds of millions of people have been killed or disfigured by smallpox in its terrible history before WHO's Eradication Programme. With no essential public health reason to do so, no country should be allowed to retain stocks of such a horrible disease. We urge WHO to unequivocally terminate research with the smallpox virus and fix a prompt and irrevocable date for the destruction of the virus stocks. The time has come for these stocks to be destroyed once and for all and this can only be accomplished through the will of the WHA.

Statement on Agenda item 13.7: Substandard/spurious/falsely-labelled/falsified/ counterfeit medical products
Every individual has a right to safe, quality and efficacious medicine. A critical component in addressing the proliferation of compromised medicines is ensuring that medicines are affordable; this would eliminate the incentive to produce counterfit drugs. We urge member states to agree on bold solutions to deal with "high prices" of medicines, otherwise we are unlikely to satisfactorily resolve the problem of compromised medicines. To effectively address this issue, we need to focus on strengthening national drug regulatory systems. Many initiatives have lost sight of this and instead divert scarce resources to "quick fixes", including

enforcement agencies, which do little to protect public health in the long term. We urge member states to once again refocus their attention on addressing the aboveroot causes of proliferation of compromised medicines.

We also urge member states to take decisions on this matter based on concrete and reliable evidence as the statistics currently being circulated are largely from industrial groups and are not reliable. Owing to the confusion over the term "counterfeit", it is also common for statistics to confuse the problem of substandard medicines with infringements of intellectual property. Obtaining reliable evidence using well-defined and transparent methodologies on the extent and nature of the problem is crucial to better understanding the problem and developing suitable solutions. We urge the working group to take up the above issues.

Statement to the 64th session of the World Health Assembly of WHO, on agenda item 13.13: Infant and young child nutrition: implementation plan
Both under-nutrition and obesity are linked to the increasing dependence of poor countries on high-income countries for food security. Nutrition strategies should address the complex socioeconomic and political determinants of malnutrition and governments, and international bodies like WHO must advocate for the regulation of the trade and marketing of non-nutritious foodstuffs, so as to protect the health of populations, and of children in particular, from aggressive corporate influence. Breastfeeding is a major safeguard against early child malnutrition and should be strongly promoted. The long-term and definitive elimination of malnutrition rests on consistent action to tackle its structural determinants.

• Oral interventions at the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, 21-26 May 2012

1. CMC-Churches Action in Health and People's Health Movementon the social determinants of health (Item number 13.6) to be presented by Meike Schleiff

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to address the distinguished members of the WHA on behalf of Churches Action for Health and the People's Health Movement.

Action on the SDH is a critical requirement for achieving Health for All but has been put at risk by the new priorities framework being implemented as part of the WHO Reform Programme.

There is no provision in the draft framework for the general programme of work for the planning, budgeting and accountability with respect to cross-cutting issues such as the right to health, gender equity and the social determinants of health. There is a serious risk that WHO's work in these fields will be allowed to wither.

WHO is properly concerned with measurement and evaluation. However, unless the indicators adopted for monitoring various programs are disaggregated using meaningful stratifiers, progress on the social determinants of health, if progress there be, remains invisible.

WHO has a leading responsibility to demonstrate leadership on the social determinants of health within the UN system including in other UN deliberations and programs, such as Rio+20 and the post-2015 development framework. There is a need to further develop the

capacity of the Secretariat to provide technical assistance in the implementation of the Rio Declaration. We urge member states to ensure the necessary funding for the work on the social determinants of health.

The "Health in all policies" approach requires that the social determinants of health in fields as diverse as trade, taxation, TNCs, financial institutions, and privatization are considered and addressed.

The social determination of health is much more than a collection of fragmented and isolated "determinants" associated with classic risk factors and individual lifestyles. We must recognize that behind those symptoms and effects lies an ideology whose ultimate goal is the commercialization of life itself.

Thank you, Chair

2. **CMC-Churches Action in Health and and NGO Forum for Health, on WHO Reform, read by Alan Leather**

The CMC and NGO Forum for Health, Geneva welcomes this opportunity to present its views on WHO programmes and priority-setting.

We reiterate the principle that the purpose of the twenty-two functions of the World Health Organization set out in Article 2 of its Constitution is to achieve the objective in Article 1, namely "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health." We also give the highest priority to the recognition in the Constitution that "[t]he enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction...."

We therefore welcome the statements in paragraph 22 of the Report (EB130/5 Add.1) by the WHO secretariat, *WHO Reform: Programmes and priority-setting,* which recognizes that the proposed general programme of work is "underpinned by the core values of WHO: a concern for equity, gender and women's empowerment, and human rights" and that "they reflect the fact that WHO is concerned with health as being instrumental in achieving other societal goals ... as well as being an intrinsic good in its own right."

We noted that the Chairman's report on the meeting of member states on programme and priorities document 65/40 stated that "The priorities of WHO should be aligned with its Constitution, particularly the principles of the preamble and the objective of the Organization of the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health, and the functions for achieving that objective as contained in Article 2 of the Constitution."

We also note that the table made available with document 65/5 indicates that the WHO's work is driven by the fundamental right to health. It is not clear, nevertheless, how the fundamental right to health is to be implemented in the other categories and criteria relating to the development of programming and planning instruments.

If the right to health is fundamental to the work of the WHO there is a need to see that right mainstreamed in WHO decisions, resolutions, programmes, and all activities.

We therefore urge the World Health Assembly to take a clear decision to ensure that the right to health is given priority and fully integrated in the draft Twelfth General Programme of Work. This will give reality to the Organization's commitment to human rights principles, meet the requirements of the Constitution, and greatly heighten the likelihood of resulting in a rights-based approach to its work. This international policy decision in turn will increase the priority given to health in domestic policy decisions and, most importantly, provide a greater voice for those most affected by exclusion from access to health.

3 **Statement of CMC-Churches Action in Health and People's Health Movementon Agenda Item 13.14: Consultative Expert Working Group on research and development, read by John Mahama**

We commend the Consultative Expert Working Group (CEWG) for their report.

The patent system as the principal driver of pharmaceutical innovation has failed to deliver the medications needed for many of the conditions faced in developing countries.

The patent system depends on recovering investment costs through charging high prices while the drugs are under patent. But poor people can't afford high prices which has two consequences: first, the poor are denied access to treatment and, second, the pharmaceutical companies do not invest in innovation for the diseases of the poor.

Because of this, both innovation and affordability require the delinking of price from research costs. This is the underlying premise of the CEWG.

The proposed convention on R&D for health would drive the mobilization of resources; manage the disbursement of such funds; coordinate public and private efforts; and provide a platform for continuing policy development and planning.

The proposed instrument will give a material reality to the global moral obligation towards the poor.

The Churches Action for Health and People's Health Movement call upon member states to adopt and implement the recommendations of the CEWG with all urgency and to ensure full transparency at all levels of this process.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

4 **Statement CMC-Churches Action in Health and Nord-Sud XXIUnder Item 13.16, O: Climate change and health**

CMC Churches Action in Health and Nord-Sud XXI and a coalition of NGOs, including the Pan-Africa Climate Justice Alliance that is present in the almost every country in Africa, renew its encouragement to WHO to play a more central and pro-active role in bringing to the attention of States, especially in the context of the international climate negotiations, the health consequences of climate change and the need for adaptation strategies to build health system resilience.

We note with appreciation the commitment of engagement in the international climate forums that WHO made at the last World Health Assembly.

Nevertheless, while appreciating these efforts, we regret that WHO's engagement in these forums appears to be waning instead of expanding.

We, for example, note that Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change does not even list WHO as an intergovernmental secretariat that contributes to work on climate change under this Convention that has ratified by every WHO member state.[21] This is especially unfortunate considering the significant impact of climate change on health and the fact that much of the needed adaptation to climate change will deal with health issues. Moreover, hundreds of billions of Euros will need to be invested in adaptation in the coming decades, much of this on health-related interventions.

We hope that WHO will have a role in influencing how this money is spent and what the priorities for health are in the context of adaptation. We also note that none of the documents prepared in the context of the WHO reform process even mention climate change as a priority issue, although the adverse effects of climate change may lead to the deaths of more than a hundred million people.

These deaths will especially affect regions most vulnerable to malnutrition and where disease burdens will increase while the capacity of health systems to deal with current levels of disease burden are not currently adequate.

Finally, we conclude with one example indicating how WHO might enhance its engagement in climate change and health. This example is the ongoing United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, which currently focuses on capacity building. In this ongoing work the need to ensure the resilience of health systems to meet the challenges poised by increased disease burdens and other health consequences has been insufficiently emphasized. WHO's cooperation with this UNFCCC coordinated effort could add significant value. Indeed, climate change is perhaps the greatest threat to global health and WHO cannot afford not to be a leader in making sure this is understood and addressed.

5 Statement by CMC-Churches Action in Health and People's Healthat WHA65 on Nutrition (Item 13.3) to be delivered by Meike Schleiff

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to address the distinguished members of the WHA on behalf of CMC-Churches Action for Health and the People's Health Movement.

There is a lot which is good in the draft comprehensive implementation plan (CIP) and we welcome many of the components of the plan at the country level.

However, the plan fails to deal with the challenge of building a regulatory framework to regulate transnational agribusiness and food corporations at global and country level.

The commercial interests of transnational agribusiness, food corporations and retailers play a powerful role in shaping nutrition and malnutrition through marketing and through price relativities. The challenge of regulation must be faced.

Meanwhile new provisions for investor state dispute settlement being inserted into preferential trade agreements provide transnational corporations with powerful new defences

[21]Summary of cooperative activities with United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations, UN Doc.FCCC/SBSTA/2012/INF.3 (29 March 2012).

against regulation at both the national and international levels. This has been clearly demonstrated in the attack by Big Tobacco on the plain packaging policies of Uruguay and Australia.

ResolutionWHA59.26 mandates the WHO to work with MS to achieve coherence across trade and health policies. This must be utilized.

Nutrition needs to be understood in the context of food security (and insecurity). More than 200 million hectares of land have been sold, mainly to transnational companies, mainly in Africa, over the past decade with widespread displacement of small producers. Meanwhile the diversion of land and grain from food to biofuels is contributing to rising food prices and jeopardising food security and nutrition. The stalemate in the Doha Development Round in the WTO leaves in place agricultural policies which have been highly detrimental to small producers in many countries.

WHO cannot address the issues of trade and the regulation of transnational industry alone but it can take a pro-active stance in working with other competent intergovernmental bodies.

Thank you, Chair.

- **Statement by CMC Churches Action for Health at the WHO's 132nd Executive Board meeting on item 15.2(e) on climate change and health, 29 January 2013**

CMC Churches Action for Health, in association with Nord-Sud XXI and Internatonal-Lawyers.Org, welcomes the contributions of the World Health Organization and its Members addressing the effects of climate change on health. Indeed, climate change remains a major challenge for public health.

Recognizing the importance of taking health into account when evaluating and adapting to climate change, we believe that this would be best addressed through a rights-based approach to health or based on the human-right-to-health, emphasizing the need to protect the most vulnerable, particularly women.

In this respect we congratulate the WHO department working on climate change for highlighting health at the Rio+20 conference held last June and UNFCCC's COP18 held Qatar in December 2012, and for collaborating with the World Meteorological Organization. In these instances we appreciate the WHO's efforts to highlight the need to address the health consequences of climate change and provide expert advice.

To be an adequate international voice for health, however, which should be taking coordinated action to address the effects of climate change, its Secretariat must show stronger leadership, both within and outside the organization. It should help lead the push for climate action in accordance with the best available science and this role should be supported from the very top of the organization. Following are some of the specific actions this would entail.

WHO should lead states in pushing for adequate public funding for adaption through the establishment of health-related windows in the Green climate fund which is currently being made operational.

WHO should continue to enhance its activities to measure, evaluate, and bring to states' attention the health-related consequences of climate change.

And WHO should encourage states to take the action necessary, in accordance with the best available science and international law, to address the adverse effects of climate change on health.

Human rights

- **Statement on the right to water and sanitation adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-S22 February 2011**

Water is life. The right to water is the right to life. Today, however, billions of people all over the world have no or insufficient access to clean water and safe sanitation. Conflicts over increasingly scarce water resources, not only between nations and competing economic sectors but also among and within communities, are already a reality. They can be expected to become more frequent and intense in the years to come. In this situation, those most affected and endangered are the poor and the marginalized, for whom the water crisis poses a dire threat to their health, livelihoods, and very existence. The indiscriminate use and abuse, exploitation and mismanagement of water resources are often aggravated or caused by the pursuit of a profit-oriented, capital growth-centred development paradigm. Discrimination and exclusion are root causes of impoverishment which includes the lack of access to safe water and sanitation that causes the death of two million people every year.

Many governments have invested significant resources in striving to meet their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals to halve the proportion of those without access to safe water and sanitation by 2015. Yet, public authorities still often fail to regulate the ownership, management and distribution of safe water to the full benefit of the most vulnerable and marginalized. Interests of the economically and politically powerful too often prevail over those of the poor.

The United Nations (UN) independent expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation confirms that it is always the same groups and individuals who are left out, namely those who face physical, institutional, cultural or other barriers, such as women, children, slum-dwellers, people living in rural areas, people living in poverty, indigenous groups, minorities, and persons with disabilities.The human right to water and sanitation is a crucial tool for bringing to light and addressingsuch systemic exclusion and discrimination. Like allother human rights, the underlying principles are non-discrimination, participation and empowerment, transparency and accountability. In the world today, human rights have been an effective ethical and legal framework to do justice to the most vulnerable, the poor and the oppressed.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2006, affirmed the biblical significance of “water as the cradle of life, an expression of God’s grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation” (cf. Genesis 1:2ff, Genesis 2:5ff). The biblical stories and images of water reflect our present day reality and engagement with this basic element of life, reminding us both of the destructive and of the life giving and sustaining nature of water we experience in our lives.

Since WCC Assembly, significant progress has been achieved in the recognition of water as a fundamental right by the international community. Most recently, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a landmark resolution affirming that access to both water and sanitation is a human right. The right to water and sanitation is now almost universally recognized as a legally binding right. A very limited number of governments have not yet publicly affirmed the rights to water and sanitation. Even fewer remain that continue to explicitly reject either

the right to water or the right to sanitation. Included among the most prominent are the United Kingdom and Canada.

Churches and their partners have contributed to this achievement, including by working through and with the Ecumenical Water Network based at the WCC. Having achieved recognition, promoting the implementation of the right to water and sanitation both in law and in practice is now crucial. As climate change, population growth, and changing lifestyles increase the pressure on and competition for the world's water resources, it becomes ever more important to apply the right to water as a guide, safeguard, and yardstick for the actions of governments and other stakeholders, including the church. With its focus on the needs of the most vulnerable, the right to water and sanitation offers a concrete tool to pursue justice for the poor and the marginalised.

As churches we are called to serve and be examples in the way we use and share water. We are called to stand with the most vulnerable as they defend their rights to life, health, and livelihoods in situations marked by scarcity, conflict, occupation and discrimination (Isaiah 1.17, Amos 5.24). We must remember that water is a blessing to be treasured, to be shared with all people and creation, to be protected for future generations.

The WCC central committee, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011, therefore:

1. ***Rejoices*** inthe recognition of the human right to water and sanitation;

2. ***Commends*** the international community for the progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals related to water and sanitation;

3. ***Stresse s***that more needs to be done to ensure that policies and other measures reach the poor and most vulnerable, as access to water and sanitation is still marked by discrimination, injustice and inequality;

4. ***Note*** with concern that adiminished understanding of water simply as a commodity that may be sold and traded according to market principles endangers access to and control over this life-giving gift of God for those who are economically, socially, or politically disadvantaged;

5. ***Urges*** governments to adopt sustainable policies that give particular attention to the rights of disadvantaged groups, communities and individuals, and that address the underlying structural reasons for discrimination in access to water and sanitation;

6. ***Challenges*** those governments that have not yet adopted the principle that access to water and sanitation are legally binding human rights to do so;

7. ***Encourages*** governments to incorporate the right to water and sanitation into national legislation and policies, making it enforceable at the national level, and to ensure access to appropriate legal remedies in all cases of violation;

8. ***Calls*** for the establishment of a mandate for a special rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation at the UN Human Rights Council;

9. ***Reaffirms*** the commitment of WCC member churches and ecumenical organizations to undertake advocacy efforts for the implementation of the right to water at all levels and to foster international co-operation of churches and ecumenical partners on water concerns through participation in the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN), as expressed in the Statement on 'Water for Life' of the WCC Assembly in 2006.

- **Joint written statement submitted by non-governmental organizations at the UN Human Rights Council's sixteenth session, item 3, on the human right to peace and freedom of religion or belief, 22 February 2011**[22]

I.

The Spanish Society for the International Human Rights Law (SSIHRL) welcomed the International Congress on the Human Right to Peace, which took place in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) in the context of the World Social Forum on Education for Peace. It approved on 10 December 2010 by consensus two important documents:

Firstly, the "Santiago Declaration on the human right to peace"[23], which represents the aspirations of the international civil society aiming at the codification of the human right to peace. It was the end of a fruitful private codification process initiated on 30 October 2006 with the "Luarca Declaration on the human right to peace"[24], which was drafted by a committee of 15 independent experts.

During the World Campaign on the Human Right to Peace (2007-2010), the SSIHRL organized workshops and expert meetings on the human right to peace in all regions of the world, receiving inputs from different cultural sensibilities. The Luarca Declaration

[22]FORWARD-Germany, Renaissance Africaine, Tribal Link Foundation, Campaign Article 9, the Lawyers Committe on Nuclear Policy (LCNP), Foundation for Gaia (GAIA), Association Biological-Cultural Diversity (ABCD), The Egyptian Association for Civic Engagement, the Sudanese Civic Forum, the Transparency Association in Bahrain, the Human Right Information and Training Center in Yemen, the Espace Associatif from Morocco, General Federation of Iraqi Women, Monitoring Net of Human Rights In Iraq (MHRI), The Association of Iraqi POWs, Association of International Humanitarian Lawyers (AIHL), Women's Will Association (WWA), The Association of Iraqi Jurists (AIJ), Conservation Centre of Environmental & Reserves In Iraq (CCERF), Human Rights Division of the Association of Muslims Scholars In Iraq (AMSI), Al-Basaer Media Association (ABMA), Studies Center of Human Rights and Democracy (SCHRD), Association of Human Rights Defenders In Iraq (AHRDI), The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (Iraqi-CHR), The Organization For Widows And Orphans (OWO), The Iraqi Association Against War (IAAW), Organization for Justice and Democracy In Iraq (OJDI), Association of Iraqi Diplomats (AID), Arab Lawyers Network (UK), Iraqi Human Rights Center, Spanish Federation of Associations on Defensa and Promotion of Human Rights (Asociación para la Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa (ADLR), Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE), Associació per a les Nacions Unides a Espanya (ANUE), Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR), Comunidad Bahá'í de España, Federación Catalana d'Organitzacions no Governamentals pelsDrets Humans (27 NGOs and CSOs), Fundación Paz y Cooperación, Institut de Drets Humans de Catalunya (IDHC), Instituto de Estudios Políticos para América Latina y África (IEPALA), Justicia y Paz. España (JP. España), Liga Española Pro-Derechos Humanos (LEPDDHH), Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad (MPDL), Paz y Tercer Mundo – Mundubat (PTM), Global Alliance for Ministries and Departments of Peace (39 NGOs, please see in http://www.mfp-dop.org/), Operation Peace Through Unity (OPTU), United Network of Young Peacebuilders (42 NGOs and CSOs, please in http://www.unoy.org/), Hague Appeal for Peace (157 NGOs and CSOs worldwide, please see in http://www.haguepeace.org), GlobalNetwork of Women Peacebuilders (48 NGOs and CSOs worldwide, please see in http://www.gnwp.org/), International Peace Bureau (20 international and 270 national NGOs, please see http://ipb.org/i/index.html), Arab NGO Network for Development (23 NGOs and CSOs, please see in http://www.annd.org/), WIDE, Network Women in Development (12NGOs, CSOs and networks, please see in http://www.wide-network.org/), InternationalAssociation of Peace MessengerCities (101 cities, please, see in http://www.iapmc.org/), NGOs without consultative status, also sharing the viewsexpressed in this statementreviewed by atechnical drafting Committee of 14 independent experts, which approved on 24 February 2010 the Bilbao Declaration on the Human Right to Peace. The full text of the Bilbao Declaration is accessible in several languages at http://www.aedidh.org

[23] See full text of the Santiago Declaration at www.aedidh.org

[24] See full text of the Luarca Declaration at www.aedidh.org

wasreviewed by a technical drafting committee of 14 independent experts, which approved on 24 February 2010 the Bilbao Declaration on the Human Right to Peace[25].

The Bilbao Declaration was also reviewed by the International Drafting Committee (ten experts from the five geographical groups), which approved on 2 June 2010 the "Barcelona declaration on the human right to peace2[26]. This text was submitted to debate at the Santiago congress, which finally approved on 10 December 2010 the Santiago Declaration, which was presented to the Advisory Committee at its sixth session (January 2011).

Secondly, the Santiago congress approved the statutes of the International Observatory on the Human Right to Peace[27], which will be operative on 10 March 2011 as a part of the SSIHRL, benefiting from the wide experience received throughout the four-year World Campaign on the Human Right to Peace, which has received the support of more than 800 civil society organizations world-wide, as well as numerous public institutions. To preserve its own autonomy, the Observatory will enjoy its own structure.

The observatory will network with local CSOs interested in the promotion and defence of the human right to peace. The CSOs that are part of the World Alliance on the Human Right to Peace will be especially invited to formalize their incorporation to the Observatory.

The main purpose of the Observatory would be the promotion and implementation of the Santiago declaration and to monitor de codification process within the UN, ensuring that the General Assembly would adopt a universal declaration taking into account the Santiago Declaration and its preparatory work.

Furthermore, the Observatory will prepare field reports; develop reliable indicators to measure the states' and other international actors' compliance with the human right to peace in accordance with the normative content of the Santiago Declaration; and publish reports on situations of serious, massive and systematic violations of the human right to peace.

The Observatory is expected to assist states and international organizations to focus on the development of the three pillars on which the Charter of the United Nations is based, namely: the system of collective security which prohibits the threat or use of force, and promote the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law; the economic and social development of peoples; and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without discrimination. Under these three pillars the human right to peace will be built.

II.

The Human Rights Council has been working since 2008 on the "Promotion of the right of peoples to peace". On 17 June 2010 it adopted Resolution 14/3 on the right of peoples to peace, which explicitly recognized "... the important work being carried out by civil society organizations for the promotion of the right of peoples to peace and the codification of that right"[28]; and "supported the need to further promote the realization of the right of peoples to peace". In that regard it requested "the Advisory Committee, in consultation with member states, civil society, academia and all relevant stakeholders, to prepare a draft declarationon

[25] The full text of the Bilbao Declaration is accessible in several languages at http://www.aedidh.org
[26] The full text of the Barcelona Declaration is accessible in several languages at http://www.aedidh.org
[27] The statutes of the observatory are also available at www.aedidh.org
[28] Last preambular paragraph of the res. 14/3 cit.

the right of peoples to peace, and to report on the progress thereon to the Council at its seventeenth session"[29].

Therefore, the Advisory Committee (recommendation 5/2, of 6 August 2010) established a drafting group of four members who submitted its progress report to the Advisory Committee in January 2011. By recommendation 6/3, of 21 January 2011, the Advisory Committee took note of the progress report[30]; increased to six the members the drafting group; and requested it to prepare a questionnaire to be distributed among all the stakeholders. In the light of the comments to be received, it will submit in January 2012 a draft declaration to the Advisory Committee. The progress report will also be submitted to the HR Council at its seventeenth session[31].

The progress report recognizes the important contribution of civil society to the international codification of the right to peace within the United Nations, paying tribute particularly to the World Campaign on the human right to peace carried out by the SSIHRL with the support of more than 800 NGO[32].

As the Santiago Declaration, the progress report suggests to consider peace as the absence of organized violence, the effective protection of human rights, gender equality and social justice, economic wellbeing and free expression of different cultural values, without discrimination[33]. Consequently, it proposes nine guiding dimensions to be included in the future draft declaration[34]. Additionally, it recognizes that the right to peace has a double dimension -individual and collective-, and that the duty-holders of the right are both peoples and individuals[35]. Besides, it notes that the establishment, maintenance and strengthening of the right to peace requires the application and respect of all human rights for all[36].

Finally, the progress report recognizes that the contribution of women to the cause of peace is fundamental to the full development of a country and world-wide welfare[37]. Therefore, all international actors should empower women in their contribution to building, consolidating and maintaining peace after conflicts and to participate at all levels of decision-making process on peace and security issues[38]. To this purpose the gender perspective should be incorporated in a comprehensive peace and human rights education[39]. Furthermore, national laws and policies discriminatory against women should be reviewed, and legislation addressing domestic violence, trafficking of women and girls and gender-based violence should be adopted[40].

III.

[29]Ibídem id., operative § 15.
[30] A/HRC/AC/6/CRP.3, of 22 December 2010.
[31]Ibídem id., paragraph 74.
[32]Ibídem id., paragraph 14.
[33]Ibidem id,, paragraph 21.
[34] According to the drafting group the nine guiding dimensions are as follows: peace as a right of all peoples; disarmament; human security and respect of our environment; resistance to oppression; conscientious objection; private military and security forces; education; development; the rights of victims and vulnerable groups; the obligations of states; and the monitoring and implementation of the right of peoples to peace, Ibídem id., paragraph 22.
[35]Ibídem id., Annex III.
[36]Ibídem id., paragraph 27.e.
[37]Ibídem id., paragraph 9.
[38]Ibídem id., paragraph 67.c.
[39]Ibídem id., paragraph 57.a.
[40]Ibídem id., paragraph 57.f.3.

The phenomenon of intolerance in matter of conviction or belief constitutes a danger for the peace in the world. As several special rapporteurs have concluded, it has been a disturbing feature in many regions of the world and has caused the loss of many lives by bringing about many wars and repression throughout human history[41]. Discrimination and violence in the name of religion or belief is at the heart of many conflicts that are based on religious issues, often intertwined with particular ethnic, national, political or historical backgrounds[42]. The HR Council recognized that "the disregard for and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, continue to bring, directly or indirectly, wars and great suffering to humankind" (resolution 4/10).

Mr A. Amor, former special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, considered that religious extremism violates the right of individuals and peoples to peace and prejudice human rights as a whole. He accordingly recommended that the General Assembly adopt appropriate instruments to combat "hatred, intolerance and acts violence, including those motivated by religious extremism" and to encourage understanding, tolerance and respect in matter of freedom of religion or belief within the framework of the purposes of the Charter and the General Assembly resolution 39/11 of 12 December 1984 (Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace)[43].

Since freedom of religion or belief is protected as a fundamental right under international law[44], the interreligious and intra-religious dialogue is vital for the prevention of conflicts[45]. Although the interreligious dialogue alone does not solve underlying problems, it may be a first step in the right direction to look at a common strategy to reduce tensions and promote tolerance[46]. Several special rapporteurs recommended that the HR Council invite member states to promote and practise dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions as a more profound way of combating racism and religious intolerance[47].

Education is an essential tool to create a genuine human rights culture in society. Schools can be a suitable place to learn about peace, understanding and tolerance amongindividuals, groups and nations to develop respect for pluralism[48]. School education should contribute to the elimination of negative stereotypes that frequently poison the relationship between

[41] Report submitted by Mr Angelo Vidal D'AlmeidaRibero, special rapporteur appointed in accordance with resolution 1986/20 of the Commission on Human Rights, E/CN.4/1987/35, of 24 December 1986, paragraph 1.
[42]Ibídem id., paragraph 42.
[43] Report submitted by Mr Abdelfattah Amor, special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, E/CN.4/1995/91, of 22 December 1994, conclusions and recommendations.
[44] International human rights instruments containing provisions on the struggle against intolerance and discrimination in matters of religion or belief are as follows: Article 2 and 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948, article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1966; the ILO Convention on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation of 1958; the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960; the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979.
[45]Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, A/HRC/6/5, of 20 July 2007, paragraph 52.
[46]Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, A/HRC/13/40, of 21 December 2009, paragraph 61.
[47] Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, and the special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mr DoudouDiène, further to HR Council decision 1/107 on incitement to racial and religious hatred and the promotion of tolerance, A/HRC/2/3, of 20 September 2006, paragraph 63.
[48]Interim report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, A/62/280, of 20 August 2007, paragraph 31.

different communities and have particularly detrimental effects on minorities[49]. Appropriate resources should also be available to develop non-formal educational programs as a partnership between governments and CSO.

IV.
Recommendations

The SSIHRL and associated CSOs welcome that the proposals of the progress report may also be found in the "Santiago Declaration on the human right to peace". However, the Santiago Declaration addresses other issues that should be included in a future declaration, namely:

- To consolidate the human right to peace in its double dimension – individual and collective – as a means to foster the right to self determination of peoples and all human rights, including the right to development

- To recognize the close relationship between human right to peace and integrity, liberty and security of the person and the refugees law; physical and mental health and wellbeing; the need to protect victims from uncontrolled weapons of mass destruction and from conventional weapons, genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and sexual violence and ensure redress for the victims; the need to disarm all weapons; the right to emigrate, to return to the country of origin and to not emigrate; the right to know the truth about human rights violations; the need to protect the rights of the most vulnerable, in particular, women and children

- To strengthen the exercise of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic rights to enhance social justice, equity and gender equality, and the elimination of extreme poverty, to enable solidarity, peace and friendly relations among all nations, races, ethnicities or religions.

- To stress that the human right to peace includes the rights to environment and to education on and for peace and all other human rights, as well as the construction of democratic, egalitarian and multicultural societies.

- To defend the dialogue and peaceful coexistence among cultures, civilizations and religions or belief, to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

- To identify further measures to implement the human right to peace in accordance with the UN Charter, the UDHR and the international and regional human rights instruments. And,

- To recognize women contribution in the field of peace-building and to stress the importance of their participation at all levels of decision-making, as affirmed by the GA in its resolutions 3519 of 1975 and 3763 of 1982; and by the SC in its resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 and 1889 (2009); and to claim a full and effective implementation of the SC resolution 1325 on women and peace and security.

[49]Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr HeinerBielefeldt, A/HRC/16/53, of 15 December 2010, paragraph 29.

- **Letter of concern to Dr Kishore Singh, special rapporteur to the Right of Education of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, regarding the right to education in Chile, 25 November 2011**

Dear Dr Kishore Singh,

Greetings from the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches.

We are writing this to bring to your attention that some representatives of the Student Confederation of Chile have visited our office this week and shared their concerns about the current upheaval in Chile. This visit falls within the context of their European information campaign to alert the Geneva community, the UN included, about their on-going struggle for structural changes in their educational system.

After almost 10 months of pacific mobilization for a public education in Chile, the students have not received any satisfactory response on the part of the government, except an insignificant increase in the education budget. Furthermore the pacific demonstrations have been met with a systematic violation of their human rights, like arbitrary arrests, political violence, death threats against the leaders of the student movement, etc.

We were informed that over the last period, the student movement has held meetings with UN representatives, including yourself, both in Chile as well as in Geneva, providing detailed information about the educational system in Chile and the non-fulfillment of the right to education by the government. It is our understanding that your were also handed a compiled report regarding the right to education in Chile, accompanied by a request to visit the country.

However, we were told that so far they have not received any response from you. In May 2009, Chile launched a standing invitation to all Special Procedures to visit the country. We believe that the visit of the special rapporteur on the right to education to Chile would be of outmost importance during this turbulant period and would promote a constructive and transparent dialogue between the government and civil society. Such a dialogue is essential in order to move forward with the necessary reforms in the educational system in alignment to the international obligations of Chile with regard to the right to education.

On 24 November, the student Confederation of Chile has called for a Latin American march with the participation of students from Colombia, the Student Federation of Peru, Ecuador, the University of Sao Paolo (Brazil), and University and Social movements from Paraguay, Buenos Aires (Argentina), Venezuela, Costa Rica and El Salvador. This is a strong indication that educational reform is a concern of the youth movement in the whole region. Education is a human right and is pivotal for the foundation of truly democratic societies.

We would thus like to call upon your good offices, Dr Singh, and invite you to respond to the request of the student movement of Chile by reiterating a request that was already initiated by your predecessor in 2007 to the government of Chile to visit the country at your earliest convenience.
Yours truly,
Mathews George Chunakara,
Director,International Affairs

- **Communiqué adopted at the World Council of Churches international study consultation on "Freedom of religion and rights of religious minorities", Istanbul, Turkey, 28 November-2 December 2011**

We, the participants of the *International study consultation on freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities* – drawn from churches, church related organizations, academia, civil society and human rights organizations and the legal profession in 23 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas and Europe – met in Istanbul, Turkey as part of an international study consultation organized by the *Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches.* The consultation analysed the situations of rights of religious minorities and freedom of religion in various contexts.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I for welcoming us and addressing the participants, and express our joy in sharing in an audience with Him and in attending the Holy Liturgy for the Feast of St Andrew, Patron Saint of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

During the study consultation we received reports on the position of religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities in 27 countries. These furthered our common understanding of the rights to which all people are entitled, highlighted many human rights concerns and enabled us to identify a number of steps to be taken to ensure freedom of religion and belief and the rights of religious minorities in various contexts.

We recognize that respect for freedom of religion or belief is a common good and a prerequisite for the democratic and peaceful progress of human society. Widespread and grievous violations of this freedom affect the stability, security and development of many states and severely impact upon the daily lives of individuals, families and communities, especially their peaceful coexistence.

We affirm that all people are endowed with inherent dignity. We recognize and reiterate the significance of international human rights standards relating to religion and belief and to religious minorities. In relation to matters of religion or belief the international human rights framework provides all persons with the right to:

- have or adopt the religion or belief of one's choice, including the right to change one's religion;
- manifest religion both privately and publicly, alone or with others, in worship, teaching, observance and practice;
- protection from discrimination in any sphere of life on the basis of religion or belief; coercion in matters of religion or belief;
- bring up children in accordance with their own beliefs;
- conscientious objection.

It is the duty of states and governing authorities to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief, in all its dimensions, for all individuals under their jurisdiction or control without regard to their religion or belief.

We recognize and welcome positive steps taken towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in a number of contexts. However, we also witness serious violations of these rights with grave concern.

During the study consultation several examples regarding the non-fulfilment of the right to religious freedom have been highlighted. In several contexts practices exist to limit the right to change one's religious status that can result in the separation of families, material and social deprivation or even criminal prosecution, imprisonment or the death penalty. Anti-conversion provisions found in a number of countries, are open to misuse, and contribute to negative public perceptions of and violence towards religious minority communities.

Many individuals are facing serious difficulties in freely professing and practicing their religion or belief as they see appropriate in the face of state or religious compulsion. In certain cases there is also state interference in the decision-making processes of a religious group, while in other cases religious law and jurisprudence is imposed by state sanction. At the same time, existing blasphemy laws have a chilling effect on public discourse and on the right to profess religion or belief, and impact disproportionately on members of minority religions.

Numerous religious communities encounter problems in obtaining the legal status necessary to function; in acquiring, building or maintaining of properties such as places of worship and burial grounds or facilities; and in providing religious and theological training. These difficulties seriously impact on their ability to manifest religious faith.

Discrimination on the basis of religion or belief is also seriously affecting the ability of religious minorities to access their rights to education, healthcare and employment and to participate in the democratic process. Discriminatory legislation and state practices provide a legitimising framework for wider discrimination in society. Deprivation, social exclusion and violence towards minorities are the inevitable results of systematic discrimination and threaten the social fabric of society.

In many instances, educational syllabuses and textbooks portray negatively or under-represent the role of religious minority groups in society and serve to affirm existing societal prejudices and promote intolerance and discrimination. Moreover, obligatory religious education of children of minority religious backgrounds in the majority faith, violates the rights of parents and children. Furthermore, existing legislation and state practice with regard to mixed marriages in certain countries can also impact negatively on the right to religious freedom with regard to the bringing up of children of such marriages.

Also the media in many countries are responsible for the negative portrayal of religious groups, thus perpetuating false stereotypes and exacerbating discrimination.

Lastly, the failure of states to protect religious minorities from violence, threatens, in some cases, the very survival of communities and is in violation of states' international obligations. The culture of impunity created by failures to investigate and prosecute crimes against members of minority communities is a threat to the long-term stability of nations.

In moving forwards, the participants in the study consultation:

- urge states to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and devise effective safeguards against violations of national and international law relating to religious freedom;
- call for concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to address violations of this right;

- invite the Commission of Churches of International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to do a follow up to this Consultation and elaborate an action plan which can address among others the relationship between secularism and religion, the issue of growing nationalism and politicization of religion, the rights and obligations of religious minorities and awareness-raising and education for the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief;
- propose as possible follow-up, the organization of thematic and region-specific Consultations and the exploration of the possibility for the creation of an ecumenical Forum on religious freedom and human rights.

The promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief should be the concern and work of all. The participants recalled the statement by the ecumenical patriarch, "*we are called to be prophetic societies of transformation in a world that has reached a deadlock. Prophetic societies of peace in a global society threatened by war, prophetic societies of dialogue in a civilization characterized by ambivalence and hostility and prophetic societies of reconciliation with the creation of God in an era, that the future of the earth is at risk"*.

• Communiqué adopted at the WCC international consultation on "Human rights of stateless people" in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 16-18 December 2011

We the participants, of an international consultation on 'Human rights of stateless people' organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and hosted by the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh from 16 to 18 December 2011 at the HOPE Centre in Dhaka, Bangladesh share our experiences and concerns on the situation of the stateless people.

We represented churches, national ecumenical councils, international organizations and the CCIA at this Consultation.

The information we received at the consultation, as well as our face to face meetings with stateless people during the field visits, helped us to understand the gravity of the problem of statelessness. Thematic presentations at the consultation addressed various aspects of statelessness, such as human rights of stateless people and international instruments protecting their rights, stateless people of Nepal, stateless people in Bangladesh, the situation of Rohingyas in Arkan state of Myanmar, and advocacy on the protection of the rights of stateless people.

Statelessness: a neglected concern

The 'stateless persons', who are not recognized as nationals by any state have no nationality or citizenship and they live in vulnerable situations. As the stateless people living in particular geographical area are not protected by any national legislation, the consequences of their situations of statelessness are profound. Statelessness that affects all aspects of life is a massive problem for twelve million people, who are located in different parts of the world. These people became stateless due to various reasons and circumstances; as a result of the denial of citizenship in situations such as when states simply ceased to exist while individuals failed to get citizenship in their successor states; political considerations that dictated changes in the way citizenship laws were applied; persecutions of ethnic minorities and discrimination

of indigenous people, etc. There are also individuals who became stateless due to personal circumstances, rather than persecution of a group to which they belong. The statelessness of people in South Asia belongs to most of these categories and is due to several of these factors.

Our experiences

Prior to the consultation, four teams of participants have had the opportunities to visit camps and communities of stateless people in different parts of Bangladesh and Nepal which helped them to understand the miserable life situations of stateless people – the Rohingyas and Biharis in Bangladesh; and Bhutanese and Tibetans in Nepal. The group, which visited Cox's Bazar, where a large number of Rohingya stateless people are concentrated, listened to sharing by Rohingyas themselves about their vulnerable situations. In the 1990s, nearly a quarter of a million Rohingyas fled from Myanmar into neighbouring Bangladesh in order to escape persecution in Myanmar.

The government of Bangladesh declared the Rohingyas illegal immigrants and placed them in refugee camps. Since the mass exodus two decades ago, about 28,000 Rohingyas still live in official camps in Bangladesh, with more than 200,000 living without support in nearby makeshift camps, according to UNHCR sources in Dhaka. These unregistered Rohingyas are denied official refugee status and are labelled as "illegal economic migrants". They live without protection of the law and are restricted from formal education, reliable health care, and regular sources of food or income. Those Rohingyas who have remained in the Arakan state of Myanmar continue to face similar discriminations.

The second group of participants who visited the "Geneva camp" of Bihari stateless people (also known as stranded Pakistanis) in Mirpur, Dhaka city, could understand more about the plight of the Urdu-speaking Muslim minority Biharis. About 200,000 Urdu-speaking minorities who during Bangladesh's civil war with Pakistan took the side of Pakistan, losing their homes, jobs and positions in society, were forced eventually to take up residence in more than 70 overcrowded camp settlements. Although, many of the Urdu-speaking minority hoped to get the permission to move to Pakistan, but only a small percentage were admitted.

For almost 40 years, the camp residents were stateless, non-citizens of Bangladesh or Pakistan. They were denied access to citizenship or government services, including education, formal employment, property ownership, and driver's licenses. In 2008, a supreme court decision recognized their nationality rights. A large percentage of the adults were registered to vote in the 2009 election. After decades of isolation and discrimination, 94% of them are illiterate, almost double the national rate.

Despite being registered as voters by many of them, a large number of Urdu-speakers still are unable to obtain proper documents, jobs, passports or compensation for their property confiscated during the war. Forty years after the independence of Bangladesh, the Urdu-speaking minority people are still seeking restoration of justice. Several Biharis who had returned to Pakistan from the then East Pakistan when Bangladesh was born in 1971, still live in Pakistan without any right to nationality. They are not recognized as citizens and are denied all amenities of citizenship by Pakistan government.

The group which visited Nepal listened to and understood the situation of the stateless people in Nepal – especially the Bhutanese and the Tibetans who live in various camps. There are 56,366 Bhutanese and around 15,000 Tibetans live in Nepal as stateless. We also heard about

the situations of other stateless people in Asia, such as the indigenous people in Northern Thailand, the ethnic Vietnamese and Laotians in Japan.

Nationality and citizenship: universal human rights

While listening to and analysing the international human rights protection mechanisms and existing legal instruments that define nationality and citizenship, we are convinced of the fact that citizenship based on nationality of an individual is a universal human right. There are substantial reasons for the international community to recognize that international law which records the nationality laws must be consistent with general principles of international law.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 15 stipulates that nationality unequivocally within the framework of universal human rights. Over the past five decades, the right to nationality has been elaborated in two key international Conventions that have brought the concept of statelessness into the United Nations framework: the 1954 Convention relating to the status of stateless persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. These Conventions created a framework for avoiding future statelessness, placing an obligation on states to eliminate and prevent statelessness in nationality laws and practices.

However, it is with dismay that we noticed that the state parties to these conventions are far less than the states adhered to other conventions and international treaties. Several international legal instruments offer means of protecting the rights of stateless people, but many states failed to ratify and comply with the Conventions on statelessness.

Biblical and theological basis for our prophetic witness

We pondered on the question that why churches and Christian bodies be concerned about stateless people. The Bible itself bears witness to the stateless condition of the Hebrew people and God's involvement to facilitate for them a homeland and therefore statehood. A popular confession of faith among the Hebrews was: "A wandering Aramean was my father: and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty and populous. And the Egyptian treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."(Deut. 26:5-9).

Not only the Israelites but other people and communities who experienced statelessness, were also the concern of God: "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Captor and the Syrians from Kir?" (Amos 9:7) is another reminder of God's promise. God gave them all a homeland and thereby statehood.

All human beings, irrespective of their race are created in God's image and should therefore be respected. Likewise stateless people and minority/ethnic groups are God's creation. Therefore we are bound to see that justice is done to them. The word of God cautions the Hebrew people: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Ex. 22:21). Jesus through the Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4:18-19 also gives expression to God's reign of justice, liberation, and wellbeing of all. His parable of the judgement of sheep and goats also draws pointed attention to being in solidarity with people

who are discriminated, marginalized and suffering (which would include stateless people and minority groups): “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”(Matt.25:35-36).

These biblical and theological bases motivate us to express our Christian commitment and to be engaged in our prophetic witness to speak for the rights of voiceless and the marginalised stateless people who live in our midst.

Recommendations

We realised that the church in each country that was represented in the Dhaka Consultation is numerically small. Since the issue of stateless people is a highly sensitive and political issue, it becomes rather difficult for the churches to take up this matter for advocacy at the governmental levels. This is mainly due to the fact that they could easily be branded as unpatriotic and are encouraging others for political dissension. It is also a matter of fact that the issue of stateless people has not yet received due attention in the churches.

Having heard the stories of the plight of stateless people in different contexts, we are reminded of our Christian call and witness to be in solidarity with the stateless people. We also underscore the need for churches to be sensitised on the problems of stateless people and the role of churches in advocacy on the basis of proper theological perspectives. It is important that churches should be encouraged to enter into alliances with like minded civil society organizations working for the human rights protection of the stateless people, especially to lobby with the governments to ratify the 1954 and 1961 United Nations Conventions on Statelessness.

We are convinced that it is utmost important that states should honour their human rights obligations to all those within the state’s territory, irrespective of nationality status. States should put in place with adequate mechanisms to protect stateless people from abuses. Our role as responsible Christians should be in our respective countries as well as at the global level to be engaged in facilitating wider understanding of the different forms and grave consequences of statelessness; enforcing existing human rights norms and legal measures to be followed up at the national and international levels to reduce statelessness; supporting wider advocacy actions in order to exert greater political pressure on states to acknowledge their responsibilities to protect the rights of individuals as citizens.

We urge the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia to take necessary follow-up actions to address the concerns of the stateless people in Asia, especially in emphasising the seriousness of the situation and the importance of advocacy for the stateless people at governmental levels as well as at the international levels highlighting the situations and emphasising the urgent need that due justice must be done.

In conclusion, we affirm that advocating the protection of the rights of the stateless people is our God-given commission. While this prophetic commitment is not an easy task in the prevailing political contexts in most countries, we believe that God being our source of strength, we are called to be engaged in this prophetic witness.

- **Oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council’s 19th Session on item 3, expressing concern on intensified violent evictions of**

urban poor communities in the Philippines and the continuing violations of the right to adequate housing, March 2012

Thank you Madame President,

I am pleased to address you from the perspective of a worldwide faith community and its member constituencies in the Philippines and bring to your attention the intensified violent evictions of urban poor communities in the Philippines and the continuing violations on the right to adequate housing a basic human rights.

Demolition Watch Network, a network of urban poor groups in the Philippines, has documented more than 50 incidents of violent evictions of homes in Metro Manila, in 19 communities and affecting more than 16 000 families during the period from July 2010 to January 2012. The same incidents also occurred in the cities of Davao, Bacolod, Cebu, and Baguio and in the provinces of Cavite and Bicol. Thousands of families were left homeless and jobless, livelihood and properties worth of millions of Pesos were destroyed, and many children were stopped schooling and traumatized. It has been reported that the violent eviction which occurred in January this year in Brgy. Corazon de Jesus, San Juan City, Metro Manila, to give way to the construction of a government city hall., More than 300 personnel of the demolition team of the city government, supported by more than 500 members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) destroyed 121 houses. On the said incident, 23 residents were beaten and punched by policemen, 24 were illegally arrested including 6 minors and a a senior citizen.

Madame President, until now, many of the families who were forcibly evicted along the Philippine Railway Site (PNR) in 2009 in Metro Manila are still homeless. They live in makeshift tents, as small as animal cages, with no water and electricity. For three years now, they endured cold nights, typhoons; heavy rains and floods in their tents. They have nowhere to go. Worst of all, every now and then, government personnel and the police pay no mercy and forcibly evict them, destroying their tents instead of giving them decent housing and of helping them in restoring their lives. Moreover, numerous urban poor communities are planned to be evicted as the current government prioritizes the public-private partnership programme that benefits big business in the country.

The lives of those who were brought in the relocation sites have worsened especially in terms of livelihood, access to social services, the condition of women and children, and in terms of security of tenure. The government failed to provide jobs and sources of livelihood for those people they forcibly evicted and transferred to the relocation sites.

Mr President, the government has used the Urban Development and Housing Act and Executive Order 152 to legalizedemolition and forced eviction and other forms of harassment to trample on the right of people to housing and livelihood. The evicted families are of the opinion that the housing programme of the government is not anymore an act of social service but a mega business enterprise in partnership with real estate developers.

Madame, president in this context, we appeal to this Council, to look into these cases of evictions and demolitions of houses and strongly urge the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to stop forced evictions of communities and demolitions of their houses. We also urge that those who have been already evicted from their homes need to be provided adequate

housing, decent jobs, and genuine social services by the Philippines government. We appeal to the UN Human Rights Council to convey the message to the Philippines government to honour its commitments and obligations under international law especially its commitment to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Thank you, Madame President.

- **Letter from the WCC's general secretary to Ms Navanethem Pillay, UN high commissioner for Human Rights, denouncing the arrest and unlawful detention of Archbishop Jovan (Vranisovski) of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 4 May 2012**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches would like to express its deepest concern concerning the arrest and detention of Archbishop Jovan (Vranišovski) of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). Archbishop Jovan was arrested on 12 December 2011 at the border crossing between Greece and FYROM and transferred to the Idrizovo prison in Skopje and later to the Suto Orizari prison, where he remains pending his trial.

Archbishop Jovan has been detained six times since 2002, when he joined the canonical Serbian Orthodox Church. In 2004, the domestic courts of first and second instance held that, in leaving the Macedonian Orthodox Church and establishing the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid", the accused had created a schism causing religious hatred, discord and intolerance. Consequently, they sentenced Archbishop Jovan to 18 months of imprisonment for undermining the position of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, conducting a service of worship in a private flat and distributing a calendar that offended the religious sentiments of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. These sentences were later overturned by FYROM's higher appellate court. It is worth mentioning that an opinion by the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief expressed concerns about the judgement's approach which seemed to suggest that any form of religious activity that has the effect of challenging the legitimacy and supremacy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church as the dominant religion was to be considered as causing religious hatred.

In 2009, Archbishop Jovan was sentenced in absentia to two and a half years, this time for embezzlement and misuse of donations at the dioceses he previously headed. In November 2010 he was arrested at the Bulgarian-Serbian border after a red Interpol notice was issued in FYROM. However, a Bulgarian court released him, on the basis that the court sentence was a result of religious persecution.

Despite the evident fear of religious persecution, Archbishop Jovan chose to return to FYROM in order to be retried, as the previous conviction was the result of a trial in absentia. Upon entering the country he was arrested and transferred to the Idrizovo prison in Skopje, without any clear indication regarding a possible retrial. After long efforts on his part, a new trial was set and is currently in process. Meanwhile, pending his trial he remains in custody in the Suto Orizari prison under very hard conditions especially in light of his poor health.

It should be noted that this goes against the criminal law of FYROM as regards detention. More particularly, under article 199 of the criminal law, detention pending trial is imposed for

crime suspects with sentences of more than five years and when there is a high possibility to commit again the same crime and a high risk of leaving the country. All these conditions do not apply in Archbishop's Jovan case. He was sentenced to two and a half years for embezzlement of assets from his previous dioceses, to which he no longer belongs. Furthermore, on his own initiative he has surrendered to the court both his passports, thus there is no risk of him leaving the country. Consequently, there are no reasons that justify his detention.
We strongly denounce his arrest and detention in violation of national criminal law. Furthermore, we believe that his persecution over the last years constitutes a flagrant violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights, mainly the right to freedom of religion and belief, as guaranteed in a number of international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We call for a fair trial and for his immediate release pending his trial.

Having full confidence in the work of the United Nations for the respect, protection and promotion of human rights around the world, we urge you, your Excellency, to use your good offices to ensure that the human rights, especially freedom of religion and belief of Archbishop Jovan (Vranišovski) of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje, are fully respected.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

cc. His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, Serbian Orthodox Church
H.E. Dr Gjorge Ivanov, president of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)
Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, special papporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

- **Joint oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, Argentina (APDH) at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th Session, expressing concern for the Argentinian deaf community, June 2012**

Sra Presidenta,

La Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (APDH) y el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI) manifiestan su preocupación frente a la situación de discriminación que atraviesa la comunidad Sorda argentina.

Las personas Sordas se ven muchas veces impedidas de desarrollarse socialmente por varios factores: falta de educación, falta de acceso a la información en lengua de señas, pobres o inexistentes servicios de interpretación en lengua de señas y escasez de oportunidades de empleo de calidad. Esto ha llevado muchas veces a que vivan en la marginación social y económica, víctimas de la discriminación, y con escaso potencial político para transformar su situación de vulnerabilidad.

Esta situación se debe al desconocimiento de que la comunidad Sorda argentina -como toda otra comunidad Sorda- ha desarrollado una lengua que es visoespacial: la Lengua de Señas Argentina (LSA), evidencia una cultura eminentemente visual, es decir, en interacción

lingüística entre pares. Ha construido históricamente su mundo como objeto y a ellos mismos como sujetos interactuando a través de esta lengua de señas que adquirió naturalmente.

La comunidad Sorda constituye una comunidad lingüística minoritaria con su propia lengua transmitida en otra modalidad y que, por ende, desarrolla un mundo simbólico –una cultura- diferente. Los hijos Sordos de padres Sordos son los miembros reales de la misma y los hijos Sordos de padres oyentes los miembros potenciales.

Las personas Sordas son además conscientes de que deben usar la LSA en cada y en todo contexto comunicativo, puesto que el usar la lengua es en sí misma una práctica social que produce cambio social. Y produce además efectos sobre el propio hablante, cuando una persona Sorda habla español lo aplasta el oralismo y la discapacidad, en cambio, cuando habla LSA ingresa al mundo del plurilingüismo y su pertenencia a una Comunidad es un acto político y de identidad.

Es imprescindible el reconocimiento de la Lengua de Señas Argentina de manera de otorgarle el lugar que le corresponde al colectivo Sordo, ya no caracterizado como discapacitado, sino como minoría con su propio mundo de significaciones.

La APDH y el CMI consideran impostergable que el Estado argentino arbitre los mecanismos necesarios que garanticen los derechos humanos de la Comunidad Sorda argentina.

- **Joint oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC, at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th session on item 4, human rights situation in West Papua, Indonesia, June 2012**

The intervention was made jointly with the Franciscans International, ELSHAM Papua, JPIC-OFM Papua, Faith-Based Network on West Papua, Asian Legal Resource Center and Westpapua Netzwerk, and TAPOL

Madam President,

Franciscans International, ELSHAM Papua, JPIC-OFM Papua, Faith Based Network on West Papua, Asian Legal Resource Center, Westpapua Netzwerk, TAPOL and World Council of Churches would like to draw the attention on the escalating human rights violations in Papua, Indonesia.

We are deeply concerned that, despite the commitment of the Indonesian government to improve the situation in Papua and West Papua as stated by H.E. Marty Natalegawa, the Indonesian Foreign Minister during Indonesian UPR in May, the human rights situation in Papua and West Papua continues to deteriorate. We are even disappointed with the statement of, president of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, downplaying the incidents in Papua as "small-scale" compared to the current conflicts in the Middle East[50]. Since the beginning of the year, there is an increase of cases of random shooting aimed at random population, especially in the regions of Timika, Mulia, and Jayapura. We have been informed that between May and June 2012 alone, at least nine persons were killed and 12 were wounded.

[50] The statement was made during the ministerial coordination meeting on politics, laws and security held on June 12, 2012, http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/06/12/shootings-are-small-scale-sby-contrasts-papua-with-middle-east.html

The victims are civilians, both indigenous and non-indigenous Papuans, civil servants, police officers, army soldiers, and a foreign national. Often the body of the victims are left at public places to draw the attention of passer-by. The perpetrators did not take the belongings of the victims and the shootings were targeted at precise spots of the victims, giving the impression that the assailants are well-trained persons. To date, the provincial authority and the security services fail to identity the perpetrators. The population are terrorised. This extrajudicial killing method reminds us of the phenomena of "mysterious shootings[51]" used by Indonesian's Suharto regime in the 1980s to reduce crime by shooting to death the alleged criminals.

We express our grave concern on the killing of Mr Mako Tabuni, the leader of National Committee of West Papua on 14 June 2012 by the police officers in Jayapura, Papua. This killing has proved the continuous brutality of security forces in Papua.

We also would like to draw the attention of the Council on the riot incidents involving Indonesian army's battalion 756 in Honei Lama Village, Wamena region on June 6, 2012 as reported by the Indonesian police. An army member was involved in a motorcycle incident and it caused a riot that led to his death. To respond it, the army members from his battalion running amok, burning houses, car and motorcycles, wounding passer-bys and terrorising the population. As a result, at least 19 people were wounded, some are at a critical situation, and at least one person was killed. This collective public punishment reminds us of the 2003 Wamena case[52] which is still pending for prosecution by the Attorney General of Indonesia.

In the final report of UPR Indonesia, the Government of Indonesia has accepted the recommendation to "*take measures to guarantee accountability by ensuring that human rights violations, including abuses committed by Indonesian security forces and that those deemed responsible are prosecuted in a fair prompt and impartial manner*[53]".

We (Franciscans International, ELSHAM Papua, JPIC-OFM Papua, Faith Based Network on West Papua, Asian Legal Resource Center and Westpapua Netzwerk, TAPOL and World Council of Churches) urge the Government of Indonesia to:

- *Take immediate measures to stop random but targeted shootings and provide a sustainable security for all Papuans.*
- *Conduct prompt and effective investigations into all cases of human rights violations in Papuan, including the violation perpetrated by members of the military; identify and prosecute the culprits; and provide adequate remedies to the victims.*
- *Immediately start the Papua – Jakarta dialogue process, as stipulated by the statement of the president of Indonesia, involving and engaging all conflicting parties in the efforts to realise "Papua, Land of Peace".*

Thank you.

[51] The Indonesian term "Petrus" - PenembakanMisterius - means mysterious shootings.

[52] This is the case of extrajudicial killings, torture, violence against women and destruction of public property committed by the Indonesian military against Papuans following the theft of the army weaponry in Wamena in April 2003. An official investigation by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) concluded that the members of the Indonesian army allegedly breached Indonesian human rights law and deserved prosecution by the Attorney General. However, this has been delayed to date.

[53] See Draft Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Indonesia, A/HRC/WG.6/L.5

- **Joint oral intervention by the CCIA/WCC and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, Argentina (APDH) at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th Session, condemning the systematic and permanent violations of human rights and the international humanitarian law against the civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territories by the State of Israel, July 2012**

Sra Presidenta:

La Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (APDH) y el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI) desean expresar su mayor preocupación y manifestar su más enérgica condena por las violaciones de carácter sistemático y permanente a los derechos humanos y al derecho internacional humanitario perpetradas contra la población civil en el territorio palestino ocupado por el Estado de Israel.

Denunciamos el incremento de la violencia de los colonos hacia los palestinos, agravada por la aquiescencia de las fuerzas militares israelíes. En segundo lugar, la situación de los presos palestinos a quienes no se les respetan las garantías mínimas de debido proceso legal. En tercer lugar, el desplazamiento forzado de las comunidades de beduinos, como Jahalin.

Sobre la situación particular de cada territorio la APDH y el CMI encuentran en Jerusalén Este : 1-los ciudadanos palestinos residentes, en su mayoría, no tienen la ciudadanía israelí sino que tienen un permiso de residencia que pierden si se retiran de allí, y en la mayoría de los casos Israel no se las renueva o la revoca, quedando aquellos en situación de irregularidad; 2-la población palestina es sometida a desplazamientos forzados; 3-el acceso al territorio de palestinos no residentes se encuentra restringido a partir de diversos controles físicos y administrativos (sólo pueden acceder allí los palestinos que tienen permisos del Estado de Israel); 4- en las escuelas para los niños y niñas no hay espacio y el hacinamiento hace que peligre el derecho humano a la educación.

Con respecto a Cisjordania denunciamos:1- que el movimiento circular de la población se encuentra restringido por la barrera/muro, controles militares, checkpoints parciales, permanentes y voladores, caminos bloqueados por las fuerzas militares israelíes, las rutas sólo son de acceso a israelíes; 2- el acceso restringido a Jerusalén donde están muchos de los lugares sagrados para los religiosos tanto musulmanes como cristianos; 3- la expansión de las colonias, hecho que implica la expropiación de tierra palestina y el uso de recursos naturales sumamente preciados como el agua.; 4- la violencia de los colonos que se incrementa notablemente; 5- la represión desproporcionada, incluidos ataques directos con gases lacrimógenos y la existencia de muertes, como consecuencia de tales acciones; 6- la construcción de la barrera/ muro que deja a la comunidad sin acceso a la tierra que cultiva; 7- desplazamientos forzados de comunidades al sur de Hebrón que se agrava con el aumento de la tasa de desempleo, la pobreza y demás consecuencias de la ocupación.

Finalmente, en Gaza, las violaciones implican la restricción en el acceso a recursos elementales (alimento, medicamentos, agua, petróleo) lo que produce la insatisfacción de necesidades básicas.

Por todo ello, la APDH y el CMI exhortan al gobierno de Israel a que se abstenga de efectuar actos que constituyan violaciones al Derecho Internacional de los Derechos Humanos y al Derecho Internacional Humanitario en el territorio palestino ocupado militarmente.

Muchas gracias.

- **Reflections by the WCC general secretary on female genital mutilation, 6 December 2012**

Global Alliance against Female Genital Mutilation
Charity concert
Ecumenical reflections

I have been asked to offer a few remarks, some words to and about the cry we just heard from the organ. If it were not this time of the year, and if this event were not taking place during the evening, you would have read the text on the sign outside this building:

God of life, lead us to justice and peace
This is the theme the World Council of Churches has chosen for its assembly next year in Korea. This is a prayer that comes to my mind whenever the trauma and humiliation that girls and young women go through are narrated. How can we live our faith in the God of life, who actively calls us to work for justice and peace, addressing such realities that threaten the life of 6000 girls every day? No one person alone, no one Christian tradition alone, no one faith alone can actually successfully resist the forces striving against life, justice and peace.To bring the active reign of the God of life, and to work for justice and peace, we need to work together – as we are doing right now together with the Global Alliance against FGM; this includes even those of us who are far from the daily realities of this pain and humiliation.

For the WCC, the realities of FGM as an expression of violence against women came into focus especially during the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998). As teams of Living Letters composed of sisters and brothers from WCC member churches, as well as from our ecumenical sister organizations and ecumenical partners, went out to all the regions of the world, they listened to stories of how girls' and women's dignity and rights and even health and lives are violated, sometimes even in the name of religion. We received testimonies of the resilience and determination of women to overcome oppression and violence.

This helped ecumenical women to participate and make strategic contributions to the 1995 UN Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing, whose plan of action lifted up economic justice for women, access to health care and family planning, participation of women in social and policy planning, violence against women, rights of women in inheritance, and women's roles in creating and promoting peace, as central issues.

Through the WCC's programmes, Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives in Africa (EHAIA) and Women in Church and Society, the WCC has continued leading the search for Just Peace in the face of violence against women, an effort expressed in different forms, including FGM, that we are focusing on this evening.

Throughout all this, the WCC has made it very clear that violence against women in all its dimensions is a sin. We therefore continue to hold ourselves accountable for the elimination of violence and the renewal of our commitment to justice and peace among women, men and children in all levels of our life, work and witness. Allow me to add a personal word particularly to religious leaders. As religious leaders, we cannot work for human rights and the rights of religious freedom without ending gender-based violence and the violation of women's rights, especially when such perpetration is enacted in the name of religion. We must work together with leaders in civil society toward this end.

We are therefore thankful to God for graciously honouring our efforts together through so many positive results, but especially on a global level for the resolution, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly's human rights committee on 27 November 2012, which calls FGM a "harmful and a serious threat to the psychological, sexual and reproductive health of women and girls."

Although this resolution does not mean that this dehumanizing practice has suddenly been brought to an end, it is a breakthrough that gives all of us momentum for further work. This includes advocacy with governments through our churches, religious and ecumenical partners so that such an important resolution may be implemented. So we continue praying all the way to our 10th Assembly in Busan, Korea (2013), "God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace"!

WCC general secretary
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

- **Communiqué from consultation on "Towards an ecumenical advocacy on the rights of stateless people", Washington, D.C., United States, 27 February to 1 March 2013**

In September 2012, BerlinaCelsa, a nine-year-old child in the Dominican Republic, was raped and murdered. The man charged with the crime was ordered to pay a small fee to secure release from jail. When Berlina's lawyer protested the miniscule bond amount, the judge said it was appropriate because Berlina did not exist – that she did not exist legally because she was stateless. At the time she was born, Berlina was a legal citizen; however, in 2010 the government amended its nationality law and applied it retroactively, denationalizing thousands of people born to parents who were not legally residing in the state at the time of the birth. Berlina's story is one among many examples of statelessness which can be found among 12 million stateless people around the world.

The growing number of stateless people is neither a temporary problem nor the random product of chance events. It is the predictable consequence of human rights abuses, the result of decisions made by individuals who wield power over people's lives. Discrimination and statelessness live side by side; it is no coincidence that most stateless people belong to racial, linguistic and religious minorities.

We the participants of an international consultation organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA /WCC) on "Towards an ecumenical advocacy on the rights of stateless people", made up of

representatives from the WCC member constituencies, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), international organizations, civil society organizations, social and human rights activists and policy-makers, have heard stories of the plight of the stateless people in different parts of the world. We came together in Washington DC, U.S.A. from 26 February to 1 March 2013 for this international consultation of CCIA hosted by the American Baptist Churches U.S.A. (ABCUSA).

We have gathered together to assess the situation of stateless people including those who have been stranded and confined to refugee camps over several generations, to explore ways of bringing the issue of statelessness into focus as a part of global ecumenical advocacy, especially in the context of the forthcoming 10th Assembly of the WCC to be held in Busan, Korea, and to initiate discussions through a “Public issues statement on the human rights of stateless people”. We also have explored ways of seeking to influence policies at the global, regional and national levels by projecting a Christian perspective rooted in ethical responses and evolving ecumenical advocacy strategies to address the concerns of stateless people worldwide.

We affirm these cardinal universal principles and values: that every person has the right to life, liberty and security. Every person has the right to education, the right to equal protection of the law, the right not to be enslaved and to be free from torture. Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Every person has the right to opinion and expression. Every person has the right to nationality. Stateless persons are denied all of these rights. To be stateless is to be without nationality or citizenship. The United Nations 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons sets out the definition of a stateless person as one “who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.”

The UNHCR estimates that there are up to 12 million people in the world who are stateless and many more are at risk of becoming stateless. Statelessness can occur as a result of one or more complex factors including political change, differences in the laws between countries, laws relating to marriage and birth registration, the transfer of territory and targeted discrimination often due to race, ethnicity, gender or religion.

The impact of statelessness is manifold, lack of access to viable employment and education, the disintegration of families, and denial of basic necessities of life. Stateless persons may consider themselves as citizens of nowhere and therefore people without value. This notion of being invisible leads to a debilitating sense of worthlessness and desperation, to higher incidences of addiction, violence and suicide, all of which subject stateless people to exploitation in such forms as human trafficking, kidnapping etc. As a result of their plight, many stateless persons are forced to cross international borders and become refugees.

Jesus Christ, in his teaching ministry, linked the command to love God with all one's heart (Deuteronomy 6:5) with the command to love one's neighbour as oneself (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:33). By placing these two commands in immediate juxtaposition, Jesus asks us to understand each in light of the other. This is a consistent trend throughout the gospels and also the writings of St Paul; as he writes to the Galatians: "Through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'." (Galatians 5:13-14). The ways we love our neighbour reveal the authenticity of our faith in God in the most concrete terms (1 John 3:16-18).

In the story of the last judgment, the Son of Man, the King, the shepherd, the Son of the Father, the exalted Lord identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick and the prisoners of all times and all nations. He bestows the ultimate dignity upon the destitute and marginalized by giving himself to them and being unreservedly identified with them. “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” In word and in deed, Jesus takes to himself, in a very special way, the ill and the sinners, the despised and the abandoned, and treats them as his equals, making their cause his own. So too, he says now that whatever was done to the helpless was done to him.

The underlying theological assumption of active concern for those who are suffering is the belief that all people created by God constitute an inextricable unity. Solidarity and compassion are virtues that all Christians are called to practice, regardless of their possessions, as signs of their Christian discipleship. Compassion and care for one another and acknowledging the image of God in all humanity is at the core of our Christian identity and an expression of Christian discipleship. Humanitarian conduct is an essential part of the gospel. The commandment of love, the greatest commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ, is to love God and to love one another.

Living in communion with God is sustained, nourished and actualized in the church by hearing and proclaiming God’s word, the sharing of the body and blood of Christ, and a life of active compassion and care towards the disenfranchised. Caring for stateless women, men, boys and girls, the refugees and marginalized people is a sacramental act that unites Christians with God, since God has identified with them and demands we serve with acts of justice, compassion and care. God is with them as God is in the liturgy, and in the proclamation of the gospel.

The issue of statelessness must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The states must confer citizenship to prevent and reduce statelessness and protect the basic human rights of citizens and stateless people alike. Faith communities, civil societies, NGO’s and stateless persons will work together to advocate for the remedy and prevention of future statelessness. It is within the power of God the creator, the God of salvation and the Spirit of God that infuses us, to bring justice and peace to stateless persons.

- **Statement on the politicization of religion and rights of religious minorities, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

As Christians we confess the dignity accorded to all human beings by God the creator. This forms the basis for a Christian understanding of human rights. We consider freedom of religion a foundational and distinctive human right of particular importance. We want to acknowledge with gratefulness that in many contexts the importance of religious freedom as expressed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is acknowledged and safeguarded as a right for all to experience.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), from its inception, has consistently expressed its concern regarding the freedom of religion. The WCC through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) engages member churches through various

initiatives in addressing specific situations of freedom of religion and human rights. However, the WCC has never dealt with the issue of the right to religious freedom in isolation. The first WCC assembly in 1948 stated its conviction regarding "freedom of religion as an essential element in good international order" and also affirmed that in "pleading for this freedom, Christians do not ask for any privilege to be granted to Christians that is denied to others". The Tenth Assembly meeting in Busan during the year of the 1700th anniversary of the issuance of the Edict of Milan granting tolerance to Christians and all religions reiterates its commitment to religious freedom.[54] The WCC has upheld these principles during the past decades of its struggle for religious freedom and human rights.

Over the years, the WCC has adopted different statements addressing questions related to freedom of religion and human rights as well as responses to specific situations of denial of the right to religious freedom. In recent years the WCC has been concerned about the alarming trend of growing instances of hatred, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief in different parts of the world where religious minorities have been forced to live in vulnerable circumstances. There have been a number of instances reported in recent years from different parts of the world on a rise in the denial of religious freedom to religious minorities. It is in this context that the WCC has taken several initiatives during the past three years specifically to address problems related to the rights of religious minorities.

Freedom of religion: an inherent human right

Respect for freedom of religion should be treated as an inherent human right and political virtue which is a fundamental prerequisite for the democratic and peaceful progress of human society. Freedom of religion cannot be enjoyed without equality and justice. There can be no real freedom without equality and there can be no equality without the potential inclusion and participation of all citizens in any society. An adequate Christian understanding of human rights emphasizes freedom, equality and participation as embodiments of human rights. Freedom of religion is based on the intrinsic dignity of a human being, who is endowed by God with reason and free will. The cardinal principle of right to religious freedom, besides being a natural human right and a civil right, is rooted in biblical teaching and a theological emphasis of human dignity. We reiterate our affirmation that all human beings are created in the image of God, and Jesus Christ is the one in whom true humanity is perfectly realized. The presence of the image of God in each human person and in the whole of humanity affirms the essentially relational character of human nature and emphasizes human dignity. Widespread and grievous violations of this freedom affect the stability, security and development of any society and severely impact upon the daily lives of individuals, families and communities and the wellbeing of the society. It is therefore essential first to affirm that all people are endowed with inherent dignity. This is not only because human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), but Christians make the further assertion of this universal and inherent value of all from a Trinitarian perspective.

The WCC has always recognized the significance of international human rights regimes and standards relating to the freedom of religion and belief. During the work of the United Nations while drafting the UDHR of 1948, the CCIA took an active role in formulating Article 18 of the UDHR which articulates "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and

[54] The Waldensian Church delegation wished to register its dissent to the mention of the Edict of Milan, feeling that it is unhelpful to make reference in a statement on religious freedom to an historical moment when Church and State became closely aligned, resulting in an era of freedom for only one religion.

freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance". It contains normative core values which constitute the minimum standard that should be protected: inner freedom, external freedom including the propagation of one's religion, freedom from compulsion or coercion, freedom from discrimination, respect of the rights of parents and guardians and the right of the child to religious self-determination, as well as corporate freedom and legal status of religious bodies. This includes the right of conscientious objection as well as reasonable accommodation of employees' belief by employers.

This commitment was subsequently affirmed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both of 1966. This was further expanded in the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, of 1981. These rights also extend to those who do not profess a religion as their thought and conscience enjoy the same freedom. It is our firm conviction based on our theological underpinnings that human rights do not constitute a goal in themselves for protecting the interests or rights of only certain groups, but we see human rights show us the direction in which society should develop towards peace with justice. They are a vehicle enabling the life of everybody to acquire fuller and richer quality. It is in relation to life that all aspects of human rights must be assessed and in this context, the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression by individuals must be realized in every society.

We have reiterated the principles and values of freedom of religion and the duty of states and governing authorities to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief, in all its dimensions, for all individuals under their jurisdiction or control without regard to their religion or belief. It is with these convictions that the WCC emphasises the need to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and devise effective safeguards against violations of national and international law relating to religious freedom. We are of the opinion that there should be concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to protect the right to freedom of religion. In the current context, the fear is quite real that religious minorities may be further suppressed in certain countries by a rising wave of religious extremism. The rights of minority religious communities to live in peace and harmony amidst their neighbours belonging to majority religious communities is vital not only for the people belonging to faith minority groups but also for overall stability and democratic governance, especially in countries that are liberated from past elements of authoritarianism.

Rights of religious minorities in all contexts should be rooted in a democratic principle that majority and minority are to be treated as equal beneficiaries of the state, and that dignity and human rights of all people are respected and valued. Governments, religious communities, national and international human rights institutions and civil society organizations should play different roles in order to protect the rights of religious minorities and promote religious tolerance, especially when politicization of religion intensifies religious hatred and violates rights of religious minorities. Violations of freedom of religion or belief against persons belonging to religious minorities, whether perpetrated by states or non-state actors, need to be combated, be it in forms of disinformation, discrimination or persecution. Individual and communitarian rights of people belonging to all religious minorities should be respected. This is what the United Nations special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief pointed out in his recent report, saying that, in keeping with the principle of normative universalism, "the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities cannot be confined to the members of

certain predefined groups. Instead, they should be open to all persons who live *de facto* in the situation of a minority and are in need of special protection to facilitate a free and non-discriminatory development of their individual and communitarian identities". The rights of persons belonging to all minority religious groups therefore should be treated as fundamental human rights.

Politicization of religion and religionalization of politics

The contemporary world is witnessing a trend of politicization of religion. As religion occupies a more and more critical space in politics and public life, the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics have become pervasive phenomena in many parts of the world. The trend is that politicization of religion adds to political polarization, and hence the religious divide manifests itself in almost every corner of the globe. When religion becomes a dividing force in the social and political arena, in its more intensive and durable form, it can contribute to a religious chasm. Choosing political allies with more radical positions allows a religion better to defend its interests in the political arena so as to win a privileged position and favours from the government. In recent history we have witnessed the multifaceted trend of politicization of religion, but the flip side of this phenomenon, especially the impact of the religionization of politics, has not always been identified.

The religionalization of politics, which destroys communal harmony and intensifies religious hatred, is simultaneously being instrumentalized for political purposes. The religionization of politics in this context ultimately leads politics to pander to the interests of religious groups and leaders who would like to influence and control political power. Religion is being used as an effective instrument in several countries during national elections in order to create specific vote banks, especially prior to elections. The problems, by and large, persist in the assumption that parties or movements are only successful if they invoke religious identity during elections. The strategies used by certain religious groups are to devise and carve roles for themselves in politics by way of invoking religious sentiments against other, minority religious groups. At the same time they position themselves as true champions of their religion which is under threat from minority religions and their foreign affiliation. When religion is used for political gain, relations between different religious communities are increasingly impacted by changes in local and national politics which have been largely reconfigured along particular religious lines. This trend also adds reasons for people of different religions to think in narrow terms of religious sentiments and consider that their religion is more prominent than others. The rising trend of the politicization of religion thus causes serious problems not only for Christians, but it affects different religious communities who live as minorities in many areas of the world. The politicization of religion and the rise of religious extremism in many societies mutually reinforce each other. It not only poses a threat to freedom of religion of the adherents to minority religions, but the survival of religious minorities is affected.

Rise in religious intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities

We have observed with great concern several cases where the exercise of freedom of expression has been used as an excuse to violate freedom of religion for religious minorities. While the concept of "minority" is mostly a social and political construct, on a practical level these sociopolitical constructs can and do have a devastating effect on the group of people who lack the strength of numbers amid a "majority" religious community, although this situation is not restricted to religion alone.

While we recognize and indeed welcome the many positive steps taken towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in numerous contexts, we are also cognizant of the many serious violations of these rights which are of grave concern, such as the violation of the fundamental right to religious freedom by governments, individuals and majority religious groups. The continuing practices which limit the right to change one's religious status can result in the separation of families, material and social deprivation or even criminal prosecution, imprisonment or the death penalty. Anti-conversion provisions, which are open to misuse and contribute to negative public perceptions of, and violence towards religious minority communities, as found in the legislation of a number of countries should be reconsidered.

We note with concern the tendency in recent years that the discussion on freedom of religion and belief has focussed more on issues related to defamation of religion; this negates the spirit of the universally accepted norm of an individual's right to freedom of religion and belief. Moving to an approach that protects religions rather than people only undermines the basic human rights principles and international human rights standards as well as giving way to abuse laws in local contexts that persecute religious minorities. The provisions introduced in criminal procedures to misuse blasphemy laws in several countries are clear examples of this. Article 20 of the ICCPR lays down principles that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law". However, the trend is that "incitement to hatred" has been increasing, even in countries that have acceded to the ICCPR. Hence it has become a major concern that incidents which concern article 20 of the ICCPR are not being prosecuted and punished. At the same time a report of the Office of the United Nation's High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2012, "Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred", observed that:

> "the members of minorities are *de facto* persecuted, with a chilling effect on others, through the abuse of vague domestic legislation, jurisprudence and policies. This dichotomy of (1) no prosecution of "real" incitement cases and (2) persecution of minorities under the guise of domestic incitement laws seems to be pervasive. Anti-incitement laws in countries across the world may be qualified as heterogeneous, at times excessively narrow or vague; jurisprudence on incitement to hatred has been scarce and *ad hoc;* and while several states have adopted related policies, most of them too general and not systematically followed up, lacking focus and deprived of proper impact-assessments".

We see the danger that, as majority religious groups use their religion as a tool to influence the political system and political rulers, religious minorities living in the same societies are persecuted and discriminated against. Often their strategies lead to violence which threatens the very existence of the religious minorities. The alarming trend we note is that there are cases where a conflict in one place, with its local causes and character, is misinterpreted and instrumentalized as part of a conflict in another place, especially when extremist groups use religion to legitimize violence. However, it is heartening to note that the key role religion plays in conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace-building is often evident and recognized. In several countries in the world, people who identify themselves as being politically and economically excluded often feel that dominant religious groups which wield power apply discriminatory standards in dealing with minority rights issues such as freedom of religion. Although the reasons for the problems have their roots in socio-economic factors, social

fragmentation and communal hatred, such actions may increase even in traditionally tolerant societies when religion is mobilized for political purposes. The prevailing situations, especially in Asia, Africa and the Middle East prove that religions can impact and influence the geo-political contexts of countries and regions. The new developments in the context of the "Arab Spring" witnessed a number of groups and parties in the Middle East and North Africa ascend into dominant positions in the name of majority religion. In countries in the Middle East region such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran, religious minorities live in a situation of fear and insecurity.

There are instances that restrict or limit religious freedom of minority religious communities which have been observed in recent years in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in certain European countries. In practice, the discrimination and intolerance against religious groups in these countries are evident in discourses and regulations introduced by governments that question or ban religious dress, symbols and traditions.

Religious minorities in various countries face discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. Discriminatory legislation and state practices provide a legitimatizing framework for wider discrimination in society. Deprivation, social exclusion and violence towards minorities are the inevitable results of systematic discrimination which threatens the social fabric of society. Numerous religious communities encounter problems in obtaining the legal status necessary to function, as well as in acquiring, building or maintaining properties such as places of worship and burial grounds or facilities. In particular, religious minorities in several countries are denied their rights in this regard. Discrimination against religious minorities is also seriously affecting their ability to access their rights to education, healthcare and employment and to participate in the political process. In many instances, educational syllabuses and text books portray negatively or under-represent the role of religious minority groups in society. This also serves to affirm existing societal prejudices and promote intolerance and discrimination. Obligatory religious education of children of minority religious backgrounds in the majority faith violates the rights of parents and children. Existing legislations and state practices with regard to mixed marriages in certain countries negatively impact the right to religious freedom in bringing up children of such marriages of people who belong to religious minorities.

The failure of states to protect religious minorities from violence threatens the survival of communities and is in violation of states' international obligations. The culture of impunity created by failures to investigate and prosecute crimes against members of minority communities in a number of countries is evident in the politicization of religion. For example, the inaction of government and failure to implement a proper law enforcement mechanism results in gradual erosion of a long-nurtured tradition of religious tolerance. This encourages a culture of politicization of religion which threatens the very existence of religious minorities. In a country like Pakistan, the politicization of religion by military dictatorships, introduced through changes in the penal code, systematized the misuse of the Blasphemy Law which is now a major instrument used by the religious extremists against the religious minorities in the country. The politicization of religion in the Indian context constantly threatens communal harmony and peaceful co-existence of people belonging to different faiths. Constitutional guarantees of the right to religious freedom face continual threat and minority religious groups are often under attack from religious extremist groups who try to mobilize religions and religious sentiments for political gains. The politicization of religion and the religionization of politics in different African nations intensify religious hatred, communal

violence and political instability. Religious extremist groups of majority religions as well as political parties are responsible for creating such situations. Northern Nigeria, Tanzania, Sudan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Myanmar among others, provide examples of continuing violence in the name of religion and the spread of religious hatred. In certain other situations, ruling governments are using religion to wield the support of majority religions with an aim to create communal vote banks and political power. Often such actions lead to conflicts and violence, especially when governments deny religious freedom as well as when social and government restrictions on religion or a minority group are imposed. Some examples of cases where the WCC has been involved: In Malaysia, where objections to using the word “Allah” by Christians have exacerbated religious hatred and tension over the years, pro-government political parties have been responsible for intensifying the controversy. The Methodist Church of Fiji has been denied its freedom to exist as a religious body and has been continuously denied permission to convene its national assembly in the country due to interference by the government. The government of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has categorically denied the Orthodox Archdiocese of Ochrid the right to registration as a religious body. The interference of the government in the country's legal system resulted in the illegal detention of the head of the church. Kosovo faced in recent times systematic destruction of over 100 Orthodox Christian shrines while leading to historical revisionism with regard to their cultural patrimony, threatening the very existence of the Serbian Orthodox faithful. In Albania Orthodox churches are not always adequately protected, with regard to recent incidents of extremely violent actions that have occurred during times of living worship.

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

A. ***Reaffirms*** the commitment of the WCC to the principle of the universal right of all persons to freedom of religion or belief;

B. ***Reiterates*** our conviction that the Church is an important element in promoting and defending religious freedom and rights of religious minorities, based on its historic values and ethos of upholding human dignity and the human rights of every individual;

C. ***Recognizes*** and reiterates that the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief should be the concern and work of the churches and the ecumenical community as part of their prophetic witness;

D. ***Calls*** upon WCC member churches to engage actively in defending the rights of all religious minorities and their right to freedom of religion or belief, especially in opposing legislation or regulations that would limit religious freedom in contravention of international human rights standards;

E. ***Recognizes*** the positive steps being taken by various states towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in a number of contexts;

F. ***Expresses*** grave concern on the increasing trend of politicization of religion and religionization of politics as well as the growing trend of terrorism that threaten the social fabric of a society and the peaceful co-existence of religious communities;

G. ***Expresses*** grave concern on state interference in the decision-making processes of religious groups, and the imposition of religious law and jurisprudence through state sanctions;

H. ***Calls*** upon the ecumenical community around the world to mediate with their respective governments to develop policies of providing effective protection of persons and

communities belonging to minority religions against threats or acts of violence from non-state actors;

I. ***Calls*** upon governments to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and enact legislation to protect the rights of members of religious minorities and introduce effective measures and apply universal normative status regarding freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; including the right to change religion and to manifest your belief;

J. ***Urges*** states to repeal criminal law provisions that misuse blasphemy laws, apostasy laws or anti-conversion laws to punish deviation from majority religions or to discriminate against religious minorities and violate their right to freedom of religion or belief;

K. ***Urges*** states to implement anti-discrimination legislation to protect persons and communities belonging to different religions, especially to end discrimination and persecution for their faith or belief;

L. ***Commends*** the UN for its advocacy of freedom of religion or belief and *calls* on the UN, especially the Human Rights Council, to give the same priority to freedom of religion or belief as is given to other fundamental human rights and to resist any attempts to weaken the principle of freedom of religion or belief;

M. ***Calls*** on the UN to strengthen the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; and

N. ***Calls*** for concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to address violations of rights of religious minorities and their freedom of religion and belief.

- **Statement on the human rights of stateless people, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

Nationality is a fundamental human right which is affirmed in article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is a foundation of identity, human dignity, and security. Nationality is an essential prerequisite to the enjoyment and protection of the full range of human rights.

Currently, there are more than 10 million people around the world who live without any nationality: they are stateless people. Most of these stateless people have not left their country of origin.

Statelessness can occur for a number of reasons. Some relate to technical aspects of nationality laws and procedures for acquisition of documents which prove nationality. More often, however, the cause is discrimination. Minorities are often arbitrarily excluded from citizenship due to discrimination on racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic grounds.

This kind of discrimination in the nationality law has rendered stateless more than 800,000 Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority living in Rakhine State, despite their ties to Myanmar that date back centuries. Over the past 30 years, the Rohingya have been subjected to widespread discrimination including the denial of citizenship, denial of freedom of movement and the right to marry. They have suffered forced labour and detention. As a result of discriminatory conditions inside the country, more than 200,000 Rohingya have fled to

neighbouring Bangladesh, though fewer than 30,000 are officially recognized as refugees. Most unregistered Rohingya live in unofficial makeshift refugee settlements, where shelters are falling apart, and malnutrition is widespread. In spite of these conditions, aid agencies have sometimes been denied permission to assist unregistered refugees. Without residence or work permits, unregistered refugees live in fear of detention and forced repatriation to Myanmar. The lack of documentation also makes Rohingya women and girls particularly vulnerable to physical attacks, sexual violence and trafficking. Rohingya populations are also found in the Gulf countries and many have made the perilous sea journey to other countries in Asia – or have died trying.

The Bhutanese in Nepal – also called Lhotshampas – are another example of stateless people. These descendants of Nepalese migrants who settled in Southern Bhutan in the late 1890s were originally recruited by the Government of Bhutan to clear the jungles of southern states. In 1958, the Bhutanese government passed the Citizenship Act, which granted the Lhotshampas Bhutanese citizenship. However, in the 1980s, Bhutanese authorities adopted a series of policies known as "Bhutanization", aimed at unifying the country under the Buddhist Druk culture, religion, and language. After the 1988 census the Lhotshampas were re-classified as 'illegal immigrants' and the government established new requirements for citizenship that deprived many ethnic Nepalese of their nationality. By 1991, many tens of thousands had fled to India, with most going on to Nepal. Over half of the 110,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have now been resettled to third countries while the remainder continue to live in camps in wait of a solution.

In Côte D'Ivoire, hundreds of thousands of people descended from migrant workers brought to the country in colonial times have been denied Ivorian citizenship because they are deemed 'foreigners' and not eligible for nationality. This discriminatory treatment was a root cause of the continual conflict there. The government is now taking steps to resolve the situation of many of the people affected.

The 2004 Dominican government General Law on Migration put an end to the automatic right of Dominican nationality to be granted to Dominicans of Haitian descent. The law was applied retroactively, turning all children born of Haitian immigrant parents, who had arrived in the country 50 or 60 years back, stateless. Amendments to the constitution of the Dominican Republic in 2010 established new standards of citizenship along the same lines. Recently, on 23 September 2013, the constitutional court of the Dominican Republic has declared that the children of undocumented Haitian migrants in the country, even those who were born on Dominican soil decades ago, are no longer entitled to citizenship. This situation is now affecting the status of tens of thousands of people in the Dominican Republic who have never been part of any other nationality. This ruling denies Dominican nationality to anyone born after 1929 who does not have at least one parent of Dominican blood.

In addition to being often stigmatized and discriminated against, a great number of Roma people scattered in different European countries are stateless. Their lack of nationality, and therefore of identity documents and of administrative existence, hinders their access to basic human rights such as education and health services, registration of birth or marriage, etc., and increases their vulnerability to continued marginalization.

With regard to the Russian-speaking population in Latvia, although a Russian minority existed on the territory before Soviet times, approximately half a million former Soviet

citizens who found themselves on Latvian territory were rendered stateless by being deemed "non-citizens" by Latvia's 1994 citizenship law.

Statelessness can also arise when citizenship laws do not treat women and men equally. Over 25 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East continue to prevent mothers from passing their nationality on to their children on an equal basis as fathers. Where fathers are stateless, absent, or unable to confer their nationality to their children, these children are left stateless.

State succession is also a cause of widespread statelessness where individuals fail to secure citizenship in successor states. For example, when the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia broke up, large numbers of people throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Balkans became stateless. Migrants and marginalised ethnic and social groups were most affected.

Stateless people are present in every region of the world. Many migrants become stateless after they have left their countries and find themselves stranded – without nationality – through no fault of their own. Several thousand people from Myanmar, the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and many other places are stateless in the United States. The fact that they are stateless and thus unable to travel to and reside legally in another state does not give rise to protection under U.S. immigration law. It is therefore almost impossible for people without nationality to obtain residency or citizenship in the United States unless they are recognized as refugees. Many end up in immigration detention where they can remain for prolonged periods – even though there is no hope of them travelling to any other country.

Similar hardships caused by statelessness are faced by a range of populations around the world, including children of Haitian descent in the Caribbean, or people known as "bidoon" who did not acquire nationality when Kuwait achieved independence. This being said, some countries, such as Zimbabwe, have made efforts and have tried to address the issue of statelessness through legislation change.

Stateless people live in a situation of legal limbo. Without protection from any state, stateless people are often exploited and – particularly women and children – may be more vulnerable to smuggling, harassment, and violence. Since they are not recognized and registered as citizens of any country, stateless people are also denied concomitant rights such as the right to reside legally, to register the birth of a child, to receive education and medical care and to access formal employment and housing. Stateless people are also often not allowed to own property, to open a bank account, or to get married legally. Stateless people face constant travel restrictions as well as social exclusion. Due to the lack of citizenship in any country, our stateless sisters and brothers face numerous daily hardships – needless separation from their families, and fundamental uncertainty about what their lives might hold or the ability to pursue their hopes and ambitions.

As a result, not only are stateless persons denied their rights and faced with living in limbo, but their situation is rarely recognized by mainstream society. The feeling of being invisible leads to a debilitating sense of desperation. As a result of their plight, many stateless persons are forced to cross international borders and become refugees.

Because states have the sovereign right to determine the procedures and conditions for acquisition and loss of citizenship, statelessness and disputed nationality can ultimately only

be resolved by governments. State determinations on citizenship must, however, conform to general principles of international law enshrined in the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child which set out basic rights such as the right of every child to acquire a nationality and the principle of non-discrimination. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons establishes standards of protection for stateless persons. Together, these treaties establish the international framework for the protection of stateless people and for the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

The church's engagement with human rights has a long theological tradition. The underlying theological assumption of active concern for those who are suffering is the belief that all people created by God constitute an inextricable unity. Solidarity and compassion are virtues that all Christians are called to practice, regardless of their possessions, as signs of their Christian discipleship. Compassion and care for one another and acknowledging the image of God in all humanity is at the core of our Christian identity and an expression of Christian discipleship. Humanitarian conduct is an essential part of the Gospel. We are instructed in Micah 6:8 to "do justice." And the commandment of love, the greatest commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ, is to love God and to love one another.

The word of God cautions the Hebrew people: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Ex. 22:21). Jesus through the Nazareth Manifesto in Luke 4:18-19 also gives expression to God's reign of justice, liberation, and wellbeing of all. His parable of the judgment of sheep and goats also draws pointed attention to being in solidarity with people who are discriminated, marginalized and suffering (which would include stateless people and minority groups): "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." (Matt.25:35-36).

These biblical and theological bases motivate us as churches and Christian bodies to express our Christian commitment and to be engaged in our prophetic witness to speak for the rights of those who are voiceless and marginalized as stateless people. The Christian family, therefore, ought to take up the plight of stateless persons as this struggle reflects our cardinal universal principles and values: that a human being has the right to life, liberty and security; the right to education, equal protection under the law, and to be free from slavery and torture; the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and to freedom of opinion and expression; and the right to a nationality. Stateless persons are denied all of these rights and are unrecognized by any nation.

Expressing deep concern on the plight of stateless people around the world, the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

A. ***Affirms*** that the right to life, security and basic human rights are fundamental universal principles and values that every human being is entitled to;

B. ***Recognizes*** that the denial of nationality is a major violation of human rights which affects people in every region;

C. ***Encourages*** churches to raise awareness of the situation of stateless people living in their countries and around the world and to advocate for the protection of their human rights;

D. ***Calls*** on churches to engage in dialogue with states to adopt policies which confer nationality and provide proper documentation to stateless people;

E. ***Acknowledges*** positive changes in nationality laws made by some governments, and encourages other states to take similar actions;

F. ***Urges*** churches, civil society, human rights entities as well as United Nations agencies and regional organizations to collaborate in order to properly and effectively reduce and eradicate statelessness;

G. ***Prays***for stateless people around the world, so that their voices are heard and their plight understood; and

H. ***Requests*** the WCC to take up the issue of stateless people as one of its programmatic priorities until the forthcoming WCC 11th Assembly.

Interreligious relations and dialogue

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the heads of Muslim religious communities worldwide on the occasion of Eid al Fitr, 8 September 2010**

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear friends,

On the occasion of your celebration of *Eid al Fitr* at the ending of the month of Ramadan, in which the Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Mohammad, we greet you in peace and friendship. May the Almighty God bless you in this significant season!

Religious celebrations such as this provide an opportunity for cultivating relationships of trust and respect, compassion and solidarity within our multi-faith communities. Remembering Christ's commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves, as a fellowship of Churches all over the world we take this occasion to stand by our Muslim sisters and brothers in interfaith solidarity.

The WCC is deeply concerned about reports that a small church in Gainesville, Florida plans to burn a copy of the Holy Quran on the anniversary of the 11 September attacks. This call has been firmly rejected and condemned by the WCC and its member churches, ecumenical partners, including in the United States as well as by people of faith and good will elsewhere.

Religious leaders have a unique role and the moral responsibility to work towards reconciliation and healing within their own communities and between communities. We are encouraged therefore, by the interfaith solidarity expressed by the churches, religious communities and leaders in the United States, including in the State of Florida.

I experienced such an act of solidarity last week, on the last Friday of the Ramadan, while participating in the *Iftar* hosted by the heads of churches of Jerusalem for their Muslim sisters and brothers, celebrating *al-Quds* day together and giving signs of genuine cooperation and standing together strongly for justice and peace. In this way the World Council of Churches remains strongly committed to the dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

As companions on the long journey of interfaith dialogue and solidarity, I look forward in the years ahead to renewing such friendships and to developing many new ones.
Blessings,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- ## Statement issued by participants at an international consultation on Muslim-Christian relations, Geneva, Switzerland, 4 November 2010

Transforming communities: Christians and Muslims building a common futureGeneva, Switzerland

Preamble
At the joint invitation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Islamic Call Society (WICS), the Royal *Aal al Bayt* Institute and the Consortium of a Common Word, 64 Muslim and Christian leaders, scholars, and activists from around the world gathered in Geneva, from 1 to 4 November 2010, to develop concrete ways of building a common future, in order to achieve more compassionate and just societies, based on equality, co-citizenship, and mutual respect.

Nature and objectives
Very few meetings have like this one been organized as a jointly prepared and jointly sponsored consultation. It has been made possible because of the shared experience over recent decades of international Christian and Muslim consultations: Motivated by our commitment to interfaith dialogue, the consultation aimed to help Muslims and Christians move beyond the discourse of minority and majority towards upholding the principle of shared citizenship. We desired to stress the role of religion in reconciliation, instead of allowing it to be identified with conflict, and to emphasize the importance of education in eliminating mistrust among religious communities.

With this in mind the consultation focused on three main areas:

- Beyond majority and minority
- From conflict to compassionate justice
- Education for understanding and shared citizenship.

In the opening session representatives of the organizers presented their perspectives on the theme of the consultation. Short lectures by invited experts on each of the topics were presented to the full consultation. Parallel working groups then listened to local experiences from around the world presented by participants. On this basis they then considered the themes in ways which combined theoretical and practical perspectives.

Opening session

Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, opened the proceedings by welcoming the participants and thanking the Muslim partners for their commitment to this project. The consultation builds on the long experience of such meetings in which the WCC has been an active and committed partner. From its origins the WCC has been committed not only to the *oikoumene* of the Christian churches but that of all humanity. The general secretary spoke of his experience as chair of the church's dialogue with the Islamic Council of Norway. He posed three central questions to the consultation: How can communities be transformed to express an inclusive "we"?

How can Muslim and Christian leaders build relationships which can face challenges together? And how can our spiritual and religious resources be used to transform our communities?

Dr Ibrahim Rabu presented greetings from Dr Muhammad Ahmad Sharif, general secretary of the World Islamic Call Society (WICS). Based on Islamic principles, the World Islamic Call Society strongly believes that interreligious dialogue and cultural cooperation are the best ways of dealing with global challenges, whether religious, educational or social.

This gathering brings under one roof a significant number of leaders from Muslim and Christian communities at a time when all of us are anxious about the growing phenomenon of violence coupled with extremism. It is our duty, dictated by the moral need to be open towards each other, to express our deep anxiety, on behalf of Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christians, alike, as a result of the Swiss referendum that led to the banning of mosque minarets. Such an outcome contradicts the image we all hold of this country. We cannot conceal our worries that the ban may impact world relations negatively at various levels. We believe that the opportunity still exists to deal wisely with such a delicate situation. We are certain that this country will continue protecting the rights of every one of its citizens to freely practice his/her religion.

Rev. Dr Thomas Wipf, on behalf of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and the Swiss Council of Religions in Switzerland, and *HE Sheikh Yousef Ibram*, Imam of the Geneva Mosque, extended the welcome of the local and national religious communities to the consultation. Both emphasized their deep regret at the referendum of December 2009 which prohibited the building of minarets. The churches and the Muslim organizations had, both together and separately, campaigned against the ban and continue to work together to ameliorate the negative impacts of that event. This consultation, they said, will have a significant effect also on the local situation and help with looking forward to a more positive future.

Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, president of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), presented greetings on behalf of CEC and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and stated that the consultation will contribute to the development of a set of values that could strengthen the exercise of religious freedom and human rights.

In the first of two keynote lectures, HRH Prince Ghazi b. Muhammad b. Talal of Jordan, referring to the October 2007 statement 'A Common Word' signed by 138 senior Muslim scholars, focused on the shared Muslim and Christian principle of defending the oppressed regardless of religion. He quoted the example of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri who, exiled in

Damascus after having resisted the French invasion of Algeria in the 1830s, saved many thousands of Christians during sectarian clashes. Political powers and media frequently keep the public in ignorance of realities which do not suit their interests. In relation to this consultation it is therefore particularly welcome that the UN General Assembly in October 2010 agreed to establish the World Interfaith Harmony Week to take place annually in the first week of February.

The Rt Rev. Anders Wejrud, Archbishop of Uppsala, Sweden, in the second keynote address, recalled the enormous changes over the last century moving from Christian and western triumphalism through a number of disasters to work of visionary activists whose dreams led to the international and interreligious initiatives which lie behind the current event. But elements of our religious communities have become politicized, and others have suffered by association, while a backlash against religion threatens to marginalize them all. Religion and identity are closely interdependent and both are unavoidably relevant to everyday life. So when marginalized communities fear change, religion too often becomes a tool for conflict instead of a force for justice and reconciliation which are inherent in love of God and love of neighbour.

Working on the themes

1. Beyond majority and minority

HE Dr Tarek Mitri, minister of Information, Lebanon, pointed out that modern nation-state models have revived ancient hatreds, and the contemporary focus on legal minority rights encourages the development of distinct identities. Concerns for collective survival encourage a turning inwards and open the door for external interference – the example of Christian communities in the Ottoman state illustrates the process. The new nation states often lacked a shared sense of history, resting on a theoretical shared citizenship which in only some cases was able to construct a new shared history. In such situations of uncertainty, when crises destabilize, anger and frustration find release in targeting scapegoats, often religious minorities. Tensions between nation state formations and ethnic, religious and linguistic realities, when they increase, throw minorities back on their own resources and external partners. State governments make things worse by seeking to manipulate such internal differences to maintain power. This disguises the fact that social and economic problems are shared across all such communal divisions.

Prof. Dr Mahmoud Ayoub, Hartford Seminary, U.S.A., started with the reflection that there are non-Muslim countries whose Muslim populations far exceed those of countries regarded as guardians of Islam – which needs no guardians. What are minorities? Some are oppressed, others oppress. In the west a Muslim presence has been continuous since the early 8th century, often as rulers, more recently as colonial migrants. Relationships have often been disrupted by the appearance of fanatical revival movements. Currently, Muslims in North America and Europe live in a generally favourable situation, but they need to indigenize. For that they need to develop an Islamic scholarship which is relevant to, and grows out of, the western Muslim experience. The resource for such a course can be found in Qur'anic and Prophetic models: Sura 29 verse 46, 'And do not dispute with he followers of the Book except by what is best, except for those of them who act unjustly;' and 5:48, '…for everyone of you did We appoint a law and a way, and if God had pleased He would have made you a single people…'. The Qur'an wanted all the people of the book to be one ecumenical community, but none of them accepted this role, yet this goal remains a sign of hope. So we need not a *fiqh* of minorities but one of citizenship and pluralism which learns also from secular humanism.

2. From conflict to compassionate justice
Dr Aref Ali Nayed, director of the Kalam Research and Media center in Dubai, focused his presentation on growing ecologies of peace and forgiveness, citing teachings in both faith traditions which require compassion towards our neighbors. He remarked that there is an urgent need to repair, rehabilitate and maintain the scholarly and spiritual institutions that preserve and grow compassion in the hearts of young people.

Furthermore, he said we are called upon to retrieve, rehabilitate and re-articulate the true compassionate teachings of our traditions regarding the divinely ordained value of human personhood and its rights, duties and freedoms.

Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik, president of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, Moderator of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and former prime minister of Norway, began his presentation by saying that it is more difficult to win peace than it is to win war. He named the three ethical values of compassion which arise from his faith – the commandment of Jesus to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves, the understanding that we are all created in the image of God and the principle of sound stewardship of God's creation.

Dr Farid Esack, professor in the Study of Islam at the University of Johannesburg, suggested that we can never attain compassionate justice, but that we can attempt to move towards this justice. He added that justice is an imperative value and that compassion is a value which stands on its own. He added that justice without compassion is a betrayal of justice, and that we must recognize that each of us has the capacity to become what we hate in the other.

3.Education: The path to understanding, cooperation and active citizenship
Dr Ja'far Abdusalam, secretary-general of the League of Islamic Universities in Egypt and professor emeritus, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, drew attention to the many verses in the Quran that stress human diversity as something important and natural. "Islam establishes equality between all human beings. The Prophet spent a lot of time fighting discrimination and showing that we humans are all equal," he said. Educating and teaching are key means of affirming equality and non-discrimination among human beings. In relation to this Muslims and Christians should take advantage of scientific progress and learning and in respect for law. Education and science should be in the service of the community and should be open and shared. An important dimension of this is to correct the mutual images of Islam and Christianity, especially in school textbooks.

Clare Amos, speaking as a British Christian woman with many years of experience in the Middle East, asked to what extent our philosophy and understanding of the nature of education itself are influenced by our religious beliefs or theology of revelation. This issue needs to be named and identified at the start, because if we are seeing education as a tool to promote interreligious dialogue then it is surely important to acknowledge that Christian and Muslim educational philosophies may be different, and may affect and be affected by our theologies of revelation. We need to look at a range of experiences and research accumulated in recent years in a wide variety of international settings, and she referred in detail to some of these. In conclusion she again stressed the importance of remaining alive to the theological foundations of our shared educational reflection and experience.

Recommendations

Preamble

- We have mutual concerns about the issues affecting our world and our communities; we share the consequences of these issues in our lives and therefore we need to address them together.
- The basis of our faiths, as expressed in the call to get to know each other and the two commandments to love God and to love the neighbour provide a solid ground for our common responsibility to act and address common concerns.
- We regard the deepening of our mutual religious and theological understanding as a necessary dimension of our continuing dialogue, exploring both the points where we share common ground and where we differ.

1. Beyond minority and majority

- We commit jointly to work to counter discrimination, abuse of laws and unjust legal restrictions on matters related to religious identity.
- We commit jointly to undo the effects of historical injustices and stereotypes which continue to discriminate against particular religious communities.
- We commit jointly to commend the principles adopted by like-minded international and non-governmental organizations, refusing to allow religious or spiritual authority to justify discrimination and exclusion.

2. From conflict to compassionate justice

- We call for the formation of a joint working group which can be mobilized whenever a crisis threatens to arise in which Christians and Muslims find themselves in conflict.
- Religion is often invoked in conflict creation, even when other factors, such as unfair resource allocation, oppression, occupation and injustice, are the real roots of conflict.
- We must find ways to 'disengage' religion from such roles and 'reengage' it towards conflict resolution and compassionate justice.

3. Education: the path to understanding, cooperation and active citizenship

- We commend and commit ourselves to the implementation of the World Interfaith Harmony Week as adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 October 2010.
- We recommend that the organizers of this consultation consider establishing a joint project to:
  a) encourage the sharing of experiences of living together constructively in plural societies and urban settings;
  b) collect and disseminate best practices in activities and projects that build a culture of dialogue and interreligious cooperation;
  c) focus on the social and economic problems affecting more than one billion people living in poverty, which are among the most acute causes of racial, ethnic and religious conflicts;
  d) focus on environmental issues and climate change and the challenges they represent to human security.

- We affirm the importance of relevant and balanced education about the religion of 'the other' at all levels and in appropriate formats, in curricula and text books and the training of religious and community leaders, teachers, lecturers and researchers, ideally provided by an adherent of that religion.
- We encourage the production of an interfaith resource book and of joint teaching tools on Islam and Christianity for the use of religious teachers, imams and clergy, and their translation and dissemination worldwide.
- We call on those who fund and manage universities and colleges of religious training to support the establishment of teaching and research programmes in the major religions with a view to encouraging positive interreligious relations.
- We encourage the development of programmes designed to strengthen young people's abilities to play a constructive role in a plural world, to reflect on the values of compassionate justice and mutual respect, and to prepare them for future leadership roles.
- We call on the media to assume their responsibility to provide balanced coverage of the issues which concern us.

On matters of current concern

- The consultation notes with regret and pain the suffering of religious groups in various locations around the world today, where minorities are scapegoated for deeper and more complex problems.
- The consultation coincided with an escalation of tragic and violent events in Iraq, and a statement was issued.
- The participants expressed their concern about the tensions surrounding the forthcoming referendum in the Sudan. It is important that these tensions not be seen as being between Muslims and Christians.
- The participants expressed their concern at the Swiss vote to ban the construction of minarets and noted with appreciation the broad campaign against this vote.
- The consultation reaffirms the value of Christians and Muslims engaging in dialogue as a way of moving forward together.

• Letter of greetings from the WCC's general secretary to the heads of Muslim religious communities on the occasion of Eid al Fitr, 31 August 2011

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear friends,

On the occasion of the celebration of *Eid al Fitr* by all Muslim communities all over the world, the World Council of Churches greets you in the spirit of human solidarity. The days of fasting during Ramadan, which Muslims over the world have just concluded, are significant because they demonstrate the intent of the people of faith to engage in a noble act through which they demonstrate acts of solidarity towards the many disadvantaged of our

world with whom they share their own gifts of privilege which the Almighty has bestowed upon them.

This year, more than any time before, the *Eid al Fitr* should prompt Muslims and Christians to act in a spirit of oneness based on our common humanity and spotlight our energies on rallying people to form alliances for peace and reconciliation with justice. This common effort should draw in people from the many great religious traditions of our world.

Historic changes are taking place in several countries and regions of the world where Muslims live. The Middle East and North Africa have particularly experienced momentous events. These significant and life-altering events are shaping new forms of politics and their ripple effects can be felt in all arenas of global society – social, economic, cultural, and religious. As people of faith committed to justice, peace and reconciliation, we should be able to work together in order to preserve the dignity of all peoples, their basic human rights and the rule of law that applies equally to all citizens. In the predicament that we find our world in, we, as people of faith, are obliged to seek and articulate a common vision of a world through human encounters for truth and justice.

We have experienced the terrible reality of terror also in my dear homeland of Norway recently, in the commission of an evil and individual action related to mistrust and stigmatization of Muslims in European society. I am encouraged to see that even in terrible events like this, there is a strengthening of open and trusting relationships between the Christian church and the Muslim community in Norway. We need to stand together to prevent all kinds of terrorism, as we work together to build an inclusive future life based on dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims in all continents.

I would like to take this opportunity to let you know that the World Council of Churches (WCC) convened an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May of this year in Kingston, Jamaica. The nearly one thousand participants issued a common message. In this message the WCC's unequivocal commitment to peace and interreligious dialogue to serve peace is clearly spelled out: "With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments. Through intensified interreligious dialogue we seek common ground with all world religions."

The World Council of Churches offers you its greetings and prays that this blessed occasion of Eid Al Fitr will give us all an opportunity to journey together to usher in peace in our times.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement by WCC general secretary urging non-violence and respect for religions following the release of U.S. film on Islam, 14 September 2012**

The film "The innocence of Muslims" is gratuitously offensive to Muslims and to the faith of Islam, and I regret that it has been made. The film was produced and distributed by particular individuals who are not in any way representative of the attitudes of any mainstream religious group, nor indeed of particular countries or governments. This incident shows how important

it is to prevent incitement to racial or religious hatred. I believe such an insult to the heart of the Muslim faith is an insult to all peoples of faith. Christian and Muslims need to stand together in condemning such insults.

At the same time the appropriate response to such a pernicious film is not the violence taking place in parts of the Middle East that we have read and heard about over the last few days.

Such a response, apart from the suffering it causes to innocent individuals and communities, merely plays into the hands of those who wish to foment tension. In the relationships of dialogue the World Council of Churches has had over many years, we have confirmed our commitment to work together with our Muslim partners for justice and peace. So we believe that it is tragic if the reactions provoked by this film were in turn to lead to negative stereotyping of Muslims and an increase in Islamophobia in the western world.

In my role as general secretary I have a special concern for the safety and wellbeing of Christians who are living as minorities in the Middle East, in Asia and elsewhere. It is vitally important that the relevant authorities ensure that such potentially vulnerable groups are protected and do not become the target of violence by misguided individuals reacting to the actions of those far away.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Joint communiqué of the 6th meeting for dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, Iran and the WCC, Geneva, 17 – 18 September 2012**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran, Iran) held their sixth meeting for dialogue in the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, near Geneva, Switzerland, on 17-18 September 2012 which corresponds to 27-28 Shahrivar 1391. The overall theme for this meeting was “Interreligious dialogue and society: ways, means and goals”.

The meeting was the continuation of the process of dialogue between the WCC and the CID which began in 1995. Participants from the WCC came from Britain, Germany, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Switzerland and the United States. They met with five Muslim scholars and religious leaders who came from Tehran and Qom.

The general secretary of the WCC, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, welcomed the Muslim and Christian participants and spoke about the importance of the meeting at this time of considerable tension. During the two days of the meeting participants listened to stimulating papers and reflections exploring various aspects of the overall theme: how to spread the outcomes of interreligious dialogue and evaluate its impact; the opportunities and challenges involved in conveying the outcomes of dialogue to wider society; the role of key actors from religious, social and academic circles in disseminating interreligious dialogue; the importance of involving women and young people in promoting the wider acceptance of interreligious

dialogue. The papers reflected the different geographical and social contexts of the participants.

Dr Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, vice-president of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Tehran, also shared his vision for dialogue:

- The basic requirement includes commitment, cooperation and comprehensiveness.
- Its methodology should be reciprocal, respectful and representative.
- Its approach required participation, proclamation and promotion.
- Ways for dialogue included exchange, education and evaluation.
- Dialogue needs to involve people in mutual understanding, offering an Incentive approach, and be an authentically indigenous dialogue from generation to generation.

The members of the Muslim and Christian delegations emphasized the following points:

- Dialogue is the best means of overcoming misunderstandings and fostering mutual appreciation and peaceful coexistence between the adherents of different religions in today's multicultural world.
- Dialogue at the theological and philosophical level may result in significant gains in mutual knowledge, understanding and insight about each other's religion; however, it is also very important to seek to spread the fruits of such personal encounters to the members of wider society.
- We will make every effort to spread peace, friendship and peaceful coexistence among the adherents of different religions by encouraging various forms of dialogue: conceptual, joint social action and in daily life.
- The need to work strategically with various forms of media, to share the results of interreligious dialogue, was underscored.
- The participants emphasized the importance of encouraging young people to actively take part in interreligious dialogue and of ensuring that future generations promote the value of peaceful coexistence and respect for their fellow human beings, irrespective of their religion.
- We encourage the active participation of women in interreligious dialogue at all levels, recognizing women's previous initiatives.
- We agree that effective dialogue can constitute a significant means to counteract the words and actions of those who incite religious hatred or seek deliberately to dishonour what is sacred to others.
- We encourage interreligious dialogue in all sectors of society with the aim of involving all in ensuring justice, equality, non-violence, welfare, friendship and compassion in society.

We commit ourselves to taking steps towards the goals and hopes expressed in this communique. When we meet again in 2014 in Tehran will share what has been achieved in various contexts.

Participants
Rev. Dr Martin Affolderbach
Mr Rasoul Dadashi Azar
Rev. Dr Jean-Claude Basset

Dr Mohammad Reza Dehshiri
Dr Elias El-Halabi Dr Ali Mohammad Helmi
Rev. Bonnie Evans-Hills
Dr Heidi Hadsell
Dr Mohammad Hossein Mokhtari
Rt Rev. Leo Paul
Dr Mohammad Saeedimehr
H.E.Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian
WCC Staff: Clare Amos; Marietta Ruhland

Just and inclusive communities

Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN)

- **Statement adopted at EDAN women's conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2 March 2013**

We, the participants representing women with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, networks working on violence against women with disabilities, consultants and lecturers working in this particular field, met at Willow Park conference centre, Johannesburg, South Africa from 27 February to 2 March 2013 to deliberate on violence against women and children with disabilities in the context of the WCC 10th Assembly theme of "God of Life, lead us to justice and peace". With the aim of facilitating the grassroots voices of women with disabilities to make their contribution towards educating and empowering women to stand against all forms of discrimination and become agents for social change through involvement in advocacy and the healing of memories, entrepreneurship, gender, HIV/AIDS poverty and care-giving.

Having realized that violence is a universal problem and moved by the concern about the vulnerability of women and children with disabilities as targets of extreme violence in the form of sexual, emotional, psychological, physical abuse and spiritual deprivation in peaceful situations and also in situations of armed conflict;

Noting that the church has neglected its prophetic voice and has remained silent on the issue of violence and sexual abuse of women and children with disabilities;

Noting that there have been cultural practices and beliefs that have exposed the women and children with disabilities to sexual abuse;

Noting that ignorance of the various communities regarding women and children with disabilities has led to their marginalization and lack of protection;

Noting that there hasn't been reliable data on the victims;

Noting that there has been an invisibility of the victims and absence of safe space to receive support and noting that they have failed to get a voice to speak for themselves;

we state that the issue of violence against women and children with disabilities should be a global priority. Concrete and immediate action needs to be taken by the WCC, ecumenical partners, United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations, national bodies and local churches to eliminate this unacceptable occurrence. Towards this, we recommend the following;

1. Reinforce research and get reliable statistics using the methodology of inter-sectionality (gender, race, class, economic status and ability) in collecting data in regards to violence.

2. EDAN together with the international communities, regional and national actors should advocate for concrete actions to get reparations for the victims, seek justice, restore dignity and promote human security.

3. Churches are called to accountability, solidarity and love through formation of covenants of support to women and children with disabilities.

4. Develop strong advocacy and capacity-building strategies to bring change in the communities and churches to be a church of compassion and inclusion.

5. Enhance the masculinity trainings that are being carried out by Ecumenical HIV/AIDs Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) to reach a wider audience that targets boys and men.

The conference gathered around 24 international participants, including women with disabilities from Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Burundi, Kenya, South Africa, Togo and the United Sates.

The event was hosted by an emergency shelter "The Haven" in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa which provides protection to victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Indigenous Peoples

- **Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples, adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012**

1. Indigenous Peoples have the oldest living cultures in the world. Three hundred to five hundred million Indigenous Peoples today live in over 72 countries around the world, and they comprise at least 5,000 distinct peoples. The ways of life, identities, wellbeing and very existence of Indigenous People are threatened by the continuing effects of colonization and national policies, regulations and laws that attempt to force them to assimilate into the cultures of majoritarian societies. A fundamental historical basis and legal precedent for these policies and laws is the "doctrine of discovery", the idea that Christians enjoy a moral and legal right based solely on their religious identity to invade and seize indigenous lands and to dominate Indigenous Peoples.

2. Around the world, Indigenous Peoples are over-represented in all categories of disadvantage. In most indigenous communities people live in poverty without clean water and necessary infrastructure, lacking adequate health care, education, employment and housing. Many indigenous communities still suffer the effects of dispossession, forced removals from homelands and families, inter-generational trauma and racism, the effects of which are manifested in social welfare issues such as alcohol and drug problems, violence and social breakdown. Basic health outcomes dramatize the disparity in wellbeing between Indigenous Peoples and European descendants.

3. The patterns of domination and oppression that continue to afflict Indigenous Peoples today throughout the world are found in numerous historical documents such as Papal Bulls, Royal Charters and court rulings. For example, the church documents *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) called for non-Christian peoples to be invaded, captured, vanquished, subdued, reduced to perpetual slavery and to have their possessions and property seized by Christian monarchs. Collectively, these and other concepts form a paradigm or pattern of domination that is still being used against Indigenous Peoples.

4. Following the above patterns of thought and behaviour, Christopher Columbus was instructed, for example, to "discover and conquer," "subdue" and "acquire" distant lands, and in 1493 Pope Alexander VI called for non-Christian "barbarous nations" to be subjugated and proselytized for the "propagation of the Christian empire." Three years later, England's King Henry VII followed the pattern of domination by instructing John Cabot and his sons to locate, subdue and take possession of the "islands, countries, regions, of the heathens and infidels... unknown to Christian people." Thereafter, for example, English, Portuguese and Spanish colonization in Australia, the Americas and New Zealand proceeded under the doctrine of siscovery as Europeans attempted to conquer and convert Indigenous Peoples. In 1513, Spain drafted a legal document that was required to be read to Indigenous Peoples before "just war" could commence. The *Requerimiento* informed Indigenous Peoples that their lands had been donated to Spain and that they had to submit to the crown and Christianity or they would be attacked and enslaved.

5. In 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court used the same pattern and paradigm of domination to claim in the ruling Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. M'Intosh that the United States as the successor to various "potentates" had the "ultimate dominion" or "ultimate title" (right of territorial domination) over all lands within the claimed boundaries of the United States. The Court said that as a result of the documents mentioned above, authorizing "Christian people" to "discover" and possess the lands of "heathens," the Indians were left with a mere "right of occupancy;" an occupancy that, according to the court was subject to the "ultimate title" or "absolute title" of the United States. The Johnson case has been cited repeatedly by Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and United States courts, and the doctrine of discovery has been held by all these countries to have granted European settler societies plenary power (domination) over Indigenous Peoples, legal title to their lands, and has resulted in diminished sovereign, commercial and international rights for Indigenous Peoples and governments. Europeans believed this was proper based on their ethnocentric, racial and religious attitudes that they and their cultures, religions and governments were superior to non-Christian European peoples.

6. Consequently, the current situation of Indigenous Peoples around the world is the result of a linear programme of "legal" precedent, originating with the doctrine of discovery and codified in contemporary national laws and policies. The doctrine mandated Christian European countries to attack, enslave and kill the Indigenous Peoples they encountered and to acquire all of their assets. The doctrine remains the law in various ways in almost all settler societies around the world today. The enormity of the application of this law and the theft of the rights and assets of Indigenous Peoples have led indigenous activists to work to educate the world about this situation and to galvanize opposition to the doctrine. Many Christian churches that have studied the pernicious doctrine have repudiated it, and are working to ameliorate the legal, economic and social effects of this international framework. Starting in 2007, for example, with the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, followed by the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York in 2008, and in 2010 by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious

Society of Friends, individual churches began adopting resolutions and minutes repudiating the doctrine. In 2009, at its 76th General Convention, the Episcopal Church adopted resolution D035 – "Repudiate the doctrine of discovery." In 2010, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada adopted resolution A086 – "Repudiate the doctrine of discovery." In 2011, various Unitarian Universalist churches and Quaker organizations are adopting and considering adopting resolutions and minutes repudiating the doctrine. This issue of the doctrine of discovery has also been brought to the forefront of world attention by Indigenous Peoples working with international bodies.

7. Considering the fact that the doctrine of discovery will be the theme for the 11th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in 2012, churches and the international community need to be sensitized on this issue. The doctrine of discovery: its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples and the right to redress for past conquests (articles 28 and 37 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) will be discussed at the UNPFII from 7 to 18 May 2012; this event will bring together representatives of Indigenous People's organizations and networks around the world. Churches and ecumenical networks of the WCC will be mobilized to be part of the 11th session of the UNPFII in 2012.

In this context, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting at Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012,

A. ***Expresses*** solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples of the world and supports the rights of Indigenous Peoples to live in and retain their traditional lands and territories, to maintain and enrich their cultures and to ensure that their traditions are strengthened and passed on for generations to come;

B. ***Denounces*** the doctrine of discovery as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God;

C. ***Urges***various governments in the world to dismantle the legal structures and policies based on the doctrine of discovery and dominance, so as better to empower and enable Indigenous Peoples to identify their own aspirations and issues of concern;

D. ***Affirms*** its conviction and commitment that Indigenous Peoples be assisted in their struggle to involve themselves fully in creating and implementing solutions that recognize and respect the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and to exercise their right to self-determination and self-governance;

E. ***Requests*** the governments and states of the world to ensure that their policies, regulations and laws that affect Indigenous Peoples comply with international conventions and, in particular, conform to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labour Organization's Convention 169;

F. ***Calls*** on each WCC member church to reflect upon its own national and church history and to encourage all member parishes and congregations to seek a greater understanding of the issues facing Indigenous Peoples, to support Indigenous Peoples in their ongoing efforts to exercise their inherent sovereignty and fundamental human rights, to continue to raise awareness about the issues facing Indigenous Peoples and to develop advocacy campaigns to support the rights, aspirations and needs of Indigenous Peoples;

G. ***Encourages*** WCC member churches to support the continued development of theological reflections by Indigenous Peoples which promote indigenous visions of full, good and abundant life and which strengthen their own spiritual and theological reflections.

- **Minute of support for the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, adopted by the WCC central committee, Kolympari, Crete, 25 August–5 September 2012**

Minute of support for the Indigenous Peoples of Australia

The World Council of Churches has a long history of concern for the Indigenous Peoples of Australia. They have suffered dispossession of their lands and loss of language and culture and had to cope with decades of attempts at forced assimilation. Still today the Indigenous Peoples of Australia suffer grievously in socioeconomic terms, and they are seriously disadvantaged compared to other Australians.

Following a WCC "Living Letters" visit to Australia in September 2010, the WCC central committee in February 2011 approved a "Statement on the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Australia". This statement noted the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response, known as the "Intervention", which imposed severe restrictions on the rights and freedoms of Indigenous families and communities in the Northern Territory and was highly discriminatory in nature.

The most objectionable factor about the Intervention is that it was imposed without any consultation with Indigenous communities and their leaders. The outcry from Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory resulted in some relief from the more discriminatory measures in the years 2007-2010, but still left most restrictions in place and no sense of partnership between Indigenous Peoples and the Australian Government.

In April 2009 the Australian Government officially endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Both the Australian Government and Indigenous Peoples acknowledged this as an important step in resetting the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and moving forward towards a new future. However, indigenous leaders in Australia have identified the necessity to implement the UN Declaration, particularly Article 3 which recognizes that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination.

In June 2012 the Australian Parliament approved new legislation titled "Stronger futures in the Northern Territory". While this legislation is less severe than the 2007 legislation, in that it removes some previous restrictions, contains fewer punitive measures against indigenous families and communities, and commits increased amounts of financial support aimed at improving the plight of Indigenous Peoples, it still disempowers Indigenous families and communities in the Northern Territory and for the first time extends some control and punitive provisions beyond the Northern Territory.

In the months prior to the passing of this 2012 legislation, the Australian government did undertake a consultation process with indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. However, indigenous leaders throughout Australia continue to be outraged at the lack of notice taken by the government of their views and suggestions. Indigenous communities and

their leaders feel the government approach is that of imposition, discrimination, control and punishment.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has called on all parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) to "Ensure that members of Indigenous Peoples have equal rights in respect of effective participation in public life, and that no decisions directly relating to their rights and interests are taken without their informed consent". Indigenous leaders in Australia are extremely critical of the Australian Government for the Government's repeated failure to abide by this call.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012, therefore:

Reaffirms its solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Affirms the many leaders of indigenous communities who have protested against those elements of the "Stronger futures" legislation which have been implemented without any meaningful and effective negotiations with the people most affected by the legislation.

Expresses support for actions which empower Indigenous Peoples to take control of their own lives and destinies, and which enable partnerships between Indigenous communities and the Australian government towards culturally appropriate efforts for improvements in the areas of health, housing, education, employment, self-sufficiency and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples.

Endorses the actions of Australian churches in protesting against the "Stronger futures" legislation and in continuing to advocate for policies that build partnerships between Indigenous communities and the Australian government;

Encouragesthe Australian churches to give further support to the efforts of Australia's Indigenous Peoples as they seek the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples especially the right to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;

Urges the Australian Churches to work with the Australian members of the UN Peoples' Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Reiterates its call on WCC member churches to continue to uphold in prayer and to raise awareness about the specific issues facing Indigenous Peoples and to develop advocacy campaigns to support the rights, aspirations and needs of Indigenous Peoples in Australia and elsewhere.

- **Minute on Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

The Assembly theme, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace," has guided and enriched discussions during the 10th Assembly, reminding participants repeatedly of the need for increased awareness of the rights and dignity of Indigenous Peoples.

The unique rights of Indigenous Peoples derive from their cultures, histories and spiritual traditions; from their political, economic and social structures; and from their historic rights to specific lands, territories and resources. Indigenous Peoples in the world today are vulnerable in face of situations in which their lives and security are threatened. It is necessary to dismantle oppressive laws and policies of governments, particularly trade agreements and international and national practices that promote resource extraction to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples' human rights and sovereignty. Indigenous Peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples. Yet Indigenous Peoples in many parts of the world face constant threats to their lives and survival as communities. They also, as individuals, have the right to life, integrity, liberty and security of person in each context.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has a longstanding commitment to solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and to promoting their concerns, especially the need to respect and uphold their inherent rights and dignity.

While reaffirming the commitment to work on Indigenous Peoples' issues, the WCC assembly, meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013:

Calls on member churches to:

- respect Indigenous Peoples' spiritualities and support the aspirations of self-determination of indigenous communities around the world;
- reflect upon their own histories and seek greater understanding of the plights of Indigenous Peoples in different contexts;
- provideassistance to Indigenous Peoples' delegations to participate in advocacy efforts at the United Nations;
- support and strengthen the efforts of indigenous communities working to dismantle oppressive laws and policies that legitimize continued colonial practices on their lands; and
- coordinate communications among the member churches of the WCC and ecumenical actors working for Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Recommends that the general secretary:

- give special attention to Indigenous People's issues during the next programme period of the WCC; and
- maintain the Indigenous Peoples' programme with adequate staff in the WCC's Geneva office, to coordinate, facilitate and realize its programmatic commitments.

Migration

- **Minute on the rights of migrants and migrant workers adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011**

In light of the consistent biblical invitation to create communities of hospitality and care for the sojourners and the strangers who reside in our lands; and in remembrance of Christ's story that the righteous would care for strangers with the same respect that they would extend to Christ himself (cf. Matthew 25), the central committee of the World Council of Churches

(WCC) offers the following reflections on the need for churches to care for the plight of migrants and migrant workers in our world.

Migration continues to be one of the most pressing challenges of the contemporary world. According to the International Organization for Migration's *World Migration Report 2010,* it is estimated that 214 million people live and work in a country other than that of their birth or citizenship. At least half of the migrants are in the category of migrant workers and around 15% of them are believed to be in irregular status. The growing pace of economic globalization as well as the current economic crisis has created more migrant workers than ever before.

Unemployment and increasing poverty have prompted many workers in developing countries to seek work abroad, while developed countries have increased their demand for labour and the requirements for immigration, especially skilled labour. Although migrants contribute to economic growth of host countries as well as home countries, their fundamental rights have been violated, especially in the contexts of the current economic crisis. The fact remains that in many situations, migrants and migrant workers lack adequate social protection, and their educational qualifications – many of which have enhanced their applications for citizenship – are not fairly recognized by the receiving country. Their contributions to enrich the countries and situations in various ways – human development, cultural diversity, knowledge and technological skills, contribution to demographic balance in countries where ageing populations are increasing – have been totally ignored.

Several newly industrialized economic countries allow migrant workers with irregular status to stay and work; these migrants continue to live in most vulnerable situations. Migrants in an irregular situation are often denied even the most basic labour protections, due process guarantees, personal security, and healthcare. Rendered vulnerable by their irregular status, they are often afraid or unable to seek protection and relief from the authorities in receiving or sending countries.

In many contexts, human rights violations of migrant workers are closely linked to discriminatory laws and practices, and to deep-seated attitudes of prejudice and xenophobia, all of which contribute to the increased vulnerability of these individuals and groups. Political and legal debates on international migration are generally focused on issues such as border control, terrorism, transnational crimes and irregular migration. In such discussions, the human rights of migrants remain subordinate, if not marginal, to the concerns of the states.

In many host countries, a large number of migrants and migrant workers are unjustly detained without effective access to the necessary processes for the protection of their legal and human rights.

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW) was adopted in 1990 and entered into force in 2003. The main objective of the Convention is to promote respect for migrants' human rights. In so doing, the Convention does not create new rights for migrants, but aims at guaranteeing equal treatment and the same working conditions for nationals and migrants, whether documented or in irregular status. In other words, although legal migrants are entitled to claim more rights than undocumented migrants, the fundamental human rights of all need to be respected. It should be noted, in passing, that even though many countries have ratified this agreement, the EU members, the United States, Canada and Australia have, as yet, failed to do so.

While the issue of rights for migrant workers is different from issues related to human trafficking, we note that the vulnerability of migrant workers sometimes creates contexts in which migrant workers and their families are exposed to greater risks of sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, and multiple discriminations and specific challenges in access to employment and health services.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), through the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), has been actively involved in advocacy related to migration and the rights of migrant workers. Several member churches of the WCC have been actively involved in addressing the concerns of the migrants and migrant workers in their local contexts. However, a more coordinated and systematic approach to address the concerns of the migrants, migrant workers and their families needs to be undertaken within the ecumenical family in order to address this issue in a global ecumenical advocacy agenda.

Recalling the recommendations laid out in the "Memorandum and recommendations on practising hospitality in an era of new forms of migration" (2005 central committee), the central committeeof the World Council of Churches meeting in Geneva from 16 to 22 February 2011, therefore:

1. ***Encourages*** the WCC to initiate more coordinated advocacy initiatives within the framework of the recently-constituted CCIA working group on migrants, migrant workers and stateless people.

2. ***Reaffirms***the importance of fostering a culture of prayer, worship, encounter and hospitality that will deepen and enrich the inclusive call to Christian community.

3. ***Stresses***the need for WCC member churches to call on states and closely work with civil society to combat the human trafficking and exploitation, especially of women and children for sexual exploitation.

4. ***Urges*** churches to develop an advocacy strategy in their respective countries to encourage their governments to sign and ratify the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*.

5. ***Condemns*** the unjust detention of migrants.

6. ***Commends*** the commitment of churches and Christians who are engaged in protecting and safeguarding the rights of migrants and migrant workers.

Peace and disarmament

Peace

- **Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), Kingston, Jamaica, 24 May 2011**

Glory to God and peace on Earth
The message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (*Ephesians 3: 16-17*)

We understand peace and peace-making as an indispensable part of our common faith. Peace is inextricably related to the love, justice and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit as a gift and vocation. It constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for the world. The dynamic nature of peace as gift and vocation does not deny the existence of tensions, which form an intrinsic element of human relationships, but can alleviate their destructive force by bringing justice and reconciliation.

God blesses the peace-makers. Member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other Christians are united, as never before, in seeking the means to address violence and to reject war in favor of "Just Peace" – the establishment of peace with justice through a common response to God's calling. Just Peace invites us to join in a common journey and to commit ourselves to building a culture of peace.

We, nearly 1,000 participants from more than 100 nations, called together by the WCC, have shared the experience of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), a gathering of Christian churches and interreligious partners dedicated to the pursuit of Peace in the community, Peace with the Earth, Peace in the marketplace and Peace among the peoples. We met on the campus of the University of the West Indies (Mona) near Kingston, Jamaica from 17 through 25 May 2011. We are profoundly grateful to our hosts in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean region who generously have provided a rich and spacious setting for fellowship and growth in God's grace. By the very fact that we met on the site of a former sugar plantation, we were reminded of the injustice and violence of slavery and colonialism and of the forms of slavery that still plague the world today. We have been informed by the severe challenges of violence in this context as well as the brave involvement of churches in order to meet those challenges.

We brought the concerns of our churches and regions to Jamaica; we spoke with one another here; now, we have a word to share with the churches and the world. We have encountered one another through Bible study, spiritually enriching common prayer, inspiring expressions of the arts, visits to local ministries and other service agencies, plenaries, seminars, workshops, cultural events, lecture sessions, wide-ranging deliberations and deeply moving conversations with persons who have experienced violence, injustice and warfare. We have celebrated the achievements of the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010). Our engagements have inspired us in showing that overcoming violence is possible. The

Decade to Overcome Violence has generated many beautiful examples of Christians who have made a difference.

As we gathered in Jamaica, we were keenly aware of events in the world around us. Stories from our churches remind us of local, pastoral and social responsibilities for people who must deal daily with each of the issues we discussed. The aftermath of earthquake and tsunami in Japan raises urgent questions concerning nuclear energy and threats to nature and humanity. Governmental and financial institutions face the necessity of taking responsibility for their failed policies and the devastating impact on vulnerable people. We witness with concern and compassion the struggle for freedom, justice and human rights of the people in many Arab countries and other contexts where brave people struggle without global attention. Our love for the peoples of Israel and Palestine convinces us that the continued occupation damages both peoples. We renew our solidarity with the people of divided countries such as the Korean peninsula and Cyprus, and people yearning for peace and an end to suffering in nations like Colombia, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

We realize that Christians have often been complicit in systems of violence, injustice, militarism, racism, casteism, intolerance and discrimination. We ask God to forgive us our sins, and to transform us as agents of righteousness and advocates of Just Peace. We appeal to governments and other groups to stop using religion as a pretext for the justification of violence.

With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments. Through intensified interreligious dialogue we seek common ground with all world religions.

We are unified in our aspiration that war should become illegal. Struggling for peace on earth we are confronted with our different contexts and histories. We realize that different churches and religions bring diverse perspectives to the path towards peace. Some among us begin from the standpoint of personal conversion and morality, the acceptance of God's peace in one's heart as the basis for peace-making in family, community, economy, as well as in all the Earth and the world of nations. Some stress the need to focus first on mutual support and correction within the body of Christ if peace is to be realized. Some encourage the churches' commitment to broad social movements and the public witness of the church. Each approach has merit; they are not mutually exclusive. In fact they belong inseparably together. Even in our diversity we can speak with one voice.

Peace in the community

Churches learn the complexities of Just Peace as we hear of the intersection of multiple injustices and oppressions that are simultaneously at work in the lives of many. Members of one family or community may be oppressed and also the oppressors of others. Churches must help in identifying the everyday choices that can end abuse and promote human rights, gender justice, climate justice, economic justice, unity and peace. The churches need to continue to confront racism and casteism as dehumanizing realities in today's world. Likewise, violence against women and children must be named as sin. Conscious efforts are required for the full integration of differently abled people. Issues of sexuality divide the churches, and therefore we ask the WCC to create safe spaces to address dividing issues of human sexuality. At every level churches play a role in supporting and protecting the right of conscientious objection, and in assuring asylum for those who oppose and resist militarism and armed conflicts. The churches must raise their common voice to protect our Christian brothers and sisters as well

as all humans who are subjected to discrimination and persecution on the grounds of religious intolerance. Peace education must move to the centre of every curriculum in schools, seminaries and universities. We acknowledge the peace-making capacity of youth and call on the churches to develop and strengthen networks of Just Peace ministries. The church is called to go public with its concerns, speaking the truth beyond the walls of its own sanctuary.

Peace with the Earth

The environmental crisis is profoundly an ethical and spiritual crisis of humanity. Recognizing the damage human activity has done to the Earth, we reaffirm our commitment to the integrity of creation and the daily lifestyle it demands. Our concern for the Earth and our concern for humanity go hand in hand. Natural resources and common goods such as water must be shared in a just and sustainable manner. We join global civil society in urging governments to reconstruct radically all our economic activities towards the goal of an ecologically sustainable economy. The extensive use of fossil fuels and CO_2 emissions must be reduced urgently to a level that keeps climate change limited. The ecological debt of the industrialized countries responsible for climate change must be considered when CO_2 emission shares and plans for adaptation costs are negotiated. The nuclear catastrophe of Fukushima has proved once again that must no longer rely on nuclear power as a source of energy. We reject strategies such as an increased production of agro fuel which hurt the poor by competing with food production.

Peace in the marketplace

The global economy often provides many examples of structural violence that victimizes not through the direct use of weapons or physical force but by passive acceptance of widespread poverty, trade disparities and inequality among classes and nations. In contrast to unfettered economic growth as envisioned by the neoliberal system, the Bible signals a vision of life in abundance for all. The churches must learn to advocate more effectively for full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights as the foundation for “economies of life”.

It is a scandal that enormous amounts of money are spent on military budgets and toward providing weapons for allies and the arms trade while this money is urgently needed to eradicate poverty around the globe, and to fund an ecologically and socially responsible reorientation of the world economy. We urge the governments of this world to take immediate action to redirect their financial resources to programmes that foster life rather than death. We encourage the churches to adopt common strategies toward transforming economies. The churches must address more effectively irresponsible concentration of power and wealth as well as the disease of corruption. Steps toward just and sustainable economies include more effective rules for the financial market, the introduction of taxes on financial transactions and just trade relationships.

Peace among the peoples

History, especially in the witness of the historic peace churches, reminds us of the fact that violence is contrary to the will of God and can never resolve conflicts. It is for this reason that we are moving beyond the doctrine of just war towards a commitment to Just Peace. It requires moving from exclusive concepts of national security to safety for all. This includes a day-to-day responsibility to prevent, that is, to avoid violence at its root. Many practical aspects of the concept of Just Peace require discussion, discernment and elaboration. We continue to struggle with how innocent people can be protected from injustice, war and violence. In this light, we struggle with the concept of the “responsibility to protect” and its

possibility misuse. We urgently request that the WCC and related bodies further clarify their positions regarding this policy.

We advocate total nuclear disarmament and control of the proliferation of small arms.

We as churches are in a position to teach nonviolence to the powerful, if only we dare. For we are followers of one who came as a helpless infant, died on the Cross, told us to lay aside our swords, taught us to love our enemies and was resurrected from the dead.

In our journey towards Just Peace, a new international agenda is of the utmost urgency because of the scope of dangers surrounding us. We call on the ecumenical movement as a whole, and particularly those planning the WCC Assembly of 2013 in Busan, Korea, with the theme "God of life, lead us to justice and peace", to make Just Peace, in all its dimensions, a key priority. Resources such as *An ecumenical call to Just Peace* (ECJP) and the *Just Peace companion* can support this journey to Busan.

All thanks and praise to you, O Triune God: Glory to you, and peace to your people on earth. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

- **Congratulations by the WCC general secretary to the recipients of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, 7 October 2011**

The World Council of Churches welcomes with profound joy and deep satisfaction the decision of the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award three women peace and human rights activists – Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Roberta Gbowee and Tawakkul Karman – this year's Nobel Peace Prize. These women and the two countries they represent deserve attention. Any of the three women would be individually deserving of the prize. The burdens carried by women as well as their contributions in many conflicts are often neglected.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the 24th president of Liberia and the first elected female head of state in Africa, has demonstrated throughout her career a passionate commitment to the rights of women and the importance of education in providing a better future for her country and its successive generations. President Johnson Sirleaf's commitment to peace and reconciliation and her specific contributions to her own country and the neighbouring countries in the Mano River Union where she leads the effort for political stability and economic cooperation among Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire has been commendable.

Leymah Roberta Gbowee, another African peace activist responsible for organizing a peace movement that brought an end to the Second Liberian civil war in 2003, is also admired by those in her own country as well as throughout the African continent. An ecumenical solidarity team from the WCC just visited Liberia and confirmed in their report the need for international support to the democratic process in this country.

The exemplary leadership of Ms Tawakkul Karman, a democracy rights activist from Yemen who has been in the forefront of the people's movement, has committed her life to freedom and dignity in Yemen. Her active participation and leadership at the centre of the protest movement has been admirable.

The decision to honour these three committed women and responsible leaders who have committed their lives to the struggle for human rights, human dignity and peace with justice is right and commendable. In their long and arduous journey over the years in their struggle, all three have undergone much pain and suffering. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize will go a long way to accelerate the social and democratic changes and peace and reconciliation in their respective societies.

The World Council of Churches offers these women leaders of the world our best wishes and congratulations on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and we assure them of our continuing prayers and support.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **"Statement on the way of Just Peace" adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

Just Peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation. It is rooted in the self-understanding of the churches, the hope of spiritual transformation and the call to seek justice and peace for all. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives.

Those who seek a Just Peace seek the common good. On the way of Just Peace, different disciplines find common ground, contending worldviews see complementary courses of action, and one faith stands in principled solidarity with another.

Social justice confronts privilege, economic justice confronts wealth, ecological justice confronts consumption, and political justice confronts power itself. Mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation become shared public experiences. The spirit, vocation and process of peace are transformed.

As the "Ecumenical call to Just Peace" (ECJP) stated, to take the path of Just Peace is to enter a collective, dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerableand respect the integrity of creation.

1. TOGETHER WE BELIEVE

Together we believe in God, the Creator of all life. Therefore we acknowledge that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and we seek to be good stewards of creation. In wondrously creating a world with more than enough natural riches to support countless generations of human beings and other living things, God makes manifest a vision for all people to live in the fullness of life and with dignity, regardless of class, gender, religion, race or ethnicity.

Together we believe in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Therefore we acknowledge that humankind is reconciled with God, by grace, and we strive to live reconciled with one another.The life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, point toward the peaceable kingdom of God. Despite persecution and suffering, Jesus remains steadfast in his

way of humility and active non-violence, even unto death. His life of commitment to justice leads to the cross, an instrument of torture and execution. With the resurrection of Jesus, God confirms that such steadfast love, such obedience, such trust, leads to life. By God's grace we too are enabled to take the way of the cross, be disciples and bear the costs.

Together, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver and sustainer of all life. Therefore we acknowledge the sanctifying presence of God in all of life, strive to protect life and to heal broken lives.

Based on the teaching of St Paul (Romans 8:22) "For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with pain together until now", as explained by St Peter (2 Peter 3:13) "nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells", we can state that: the Holy Spirit assures us that the Triune God will perfect and consummate all of creation at the end of time. In this we recognize justice and peace as both promise and present – a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

Together, we believe that the church is called to unity. Therefore we acknowledge that churches are to be just and peaceful communities reconciled with other churches.Grounded in the peace of God and empowered through the reconciling work of Christ, we can be "agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic structures at the global level" (8th WCC Assembly, Harare, 1998).

2. TOGETHER WE CALL

The way of Just Peace provides a basic frame of reference for coherent ecumenical reflection, spirituality, engagement and active peace-making.

For Just Peace in the community – so that all may live free from fear
Many communities are divided by economic class, race, colour, caste, gender and religion.Violence, intimidation, abuse and exploitation thrive in the shadows of division and inequality. Domestic violence is a hidden tragedy in societies everywhere.

To build peace in our communities, we must break the culture of silence about violence in the home, parish and society. Where religious groups are divided along with society, we must join with other faiths to teach and advocate for tolerance, non-violence and mutual respect, as Christian and Muslim leaders are doing in Nigeria with ecumenical support.

Local churches working for peace reinforce international church advocacy for peace, and vice versa. Ecumenical advocacy at the International Criminal Court is one reason why at least some war criminals today face justice in a court of law, a historic advance in the rule of law.

Churches can help build cultures of peace by learning to prevent and transform conflicts. In this way they may empower people on the margins of society, enable both women and men to be peace-makers, support non-violent movements for justice and human rights, support those who are persecuted for their refusal to bear arms for reasons of conscience, as well as offer support to those who have suffered in armed conflicts, and give peace education its rightful place in churches and schools.

For Just Peace with the Earth – so that life is sustained
Human beings are to respect, protect and care for nature. Yet our excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other resources is doing great violence to people and the planet. Climate change, only one consequence of human lifestyles and national policies, poses a global threat to justice and peace.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was among the first to warn about the dangers of climate change. Now, after 20 years of advocacy, churches have helped bring ecological justice into the international debate on climate change. Concern for eco-justice is evident in the attention given to victims of climate change in international negotiations and at the United Nations Human Rights Council. The 10th WCC Assembly meeting in Busan strongly reiterated the ecumenical commitment to climate justice.

“Eco-congregations” and “green churches” are signs of hope. The churches and parishes of many countries around the world are linking faith and ecology – studying environmental issues, monitoring carbon output, and joining in WCC-led advocacy for governments to cut emissions of green-house gases. Some governments, such as the Seoul city government, are collaborating with local churches to help Korea’s sprawling capital conserve energy and recycle waste. In the wake of the Fukushima disaster, Christians and Buddhists already united against nuclear weapons are now united against nuclear power plants as well. They are raising a prophetic call for a nuclear-free world.

To care for God’s precious gift of creation, the reform of lifestyles and the pursuit of ecological justice are key elements of Just Peace. Concerted ecumenical advocacy is needed so that governments, businesses and consumers protect the environment and preserve it for future generations.

For Just Peace in the marketplace– so that all may live with dignity
There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world’s three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world’s 48 poorest countries. Such deep socio-economic injustice raises serious questions about economic growth which ignores social and environmental responsibility. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

Churches should be strongly committed to economic justice. The WCC and its member churches join with peoples’ movements and partners in civil society to challenge poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. The churches’ analysis of wealth and poverty has led to an ecumenical emphasis on sufficiency and to a strong critique of greed. Some churches have now developed indicators to test how well individuals, corporations and nations are sharing God’s abundant gifts.

Establishing “economies of life” is one key to building peace in the marketplace. Economies of life promote careful use of resources, sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, workers’ rights, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provision of clean water, clean air and other common goods.Regulatory structures must reconnect finance not only to economic production but also to human need and ecological sustainability. Responding equitably to the different dimensions of fair labour is increasingly important in our times.

Just Peace among the nations – so that human lives are protected
History has seen great advances in the rule of law and other protections for humanity. Yet the present situation of the human race is in at least two ways quite unprecedented. Now as never before humanity is in a position to destroy much of the planet environmentally. A small number of decision-makers are in a position to annihilate whole populations with nuclear weapons. Radical – threats of ecocide and genocide demand of us an equally radical commitment to peace.

There is great potential for peace-making in the nature of who we are. Churches together in the WCC are well-placed for collective action in a world where the major threats to peace can only be resolved transnationally.

On that basis, a diverse network of member churches and related ministries advocated with success for the first global Arms Trade Treaty. The witness of churches in war-torn communities was heard in high places. Churches from different regions pressed governments from those regions to agree on a treaty to regulate the international arms trade for the first time. A similar approach is now building inter-regional support to make nuclear weapons illegal, a goal consistent with the Vancouver Assembly's indictment of the production, deployment and use of nuclear weapons as "a crime against humanity", and its challenge that "the nuclear weapons issue is, in its import and threat to humanity, a question of Christian discipline and of a faithfulness to the Gospel".

For peace among the nations, churches must work together to strengthen international human rights and humanitarian law, promote multilateral negotiations to resolve conflicts, hold governments responsible for ensuring treaty protections, help eliminate all weapons of mass destruction and press for reallocation of unnecessary military budgets to civilian needs. We must join other communities of faith and people of good will to reduce national military capacities and delegitimize the institution of war.

3. TOGETHER WE COMMMIT

Peace constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for all creation.

Together we commit to share God's love for the world by seeking peace and protecting life.We commit to transforming how we think about peace, how we pray for peace, how we teach peace to young and old and deepen our theological reflections on the promise and practice of peace.

Together we commit to building cultures of peace in families, the church and society. We commit to mobilize the gifts within our fellowship to raise our collective voice for peace across many countries.

Together we commit to protect human dignity, practice justice in our families and communities, transform conflicts without violence and ban all weapons of mass destruction.

We understand that the protection of life is a collective human obligation today as never before in history. We commit to turn away from planet-changing patterns of consumption as the engine of economic growth, and refuse to accept that any nation's security requires the capacity to annihilate other nations or to strike alleged enemies at will anywhere on earth.

We reaffirm the "Ecumenical call to Just Peace" which states "While life in God's hands is irrepressible, peace does not yet reign. The principalities and powers, though not sovereign, still enjoy their victories, and we will be restless and broken until peace prevails. Peace-makers will speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace."

4. TOGETHER WE RECOMMEND THAT THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

a. ***Undertake***, in cooperation with member churches and specialized ministries, critical analysis of the "Responsibility to prevent, react and rebuild" and its relationship to Just Peace, and its misuse to justify armed interventions;

b. ***Lead and accompany*** ecumenical Just Peace ministries and networks in the practice of violence prevention, non-violence as a way of life, collective advocacy and the advancement of international norms, treaties and law;

c. ***Encourage*** its member churches to engage incooperative interfaith programmes in order to address conflicts in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies;

d. ***Request*** its member churches and partners to develop communication strategies that advocate for justice and peace, proclaim the hope of transformation and speak truth to power;

e. ***Facilitate*** a programme of reflection and environmental action in member churches and related networks to build sustainable communities and bring about collective reductions in carbon emissions and energy use; promote the use of alternate, renewable, and clean energy;

f. ***Develop*** guidelines within the concept of "economies of life" for the right sharing of resources and the prevention of structural violence, establishing useable indicators and benchmarks; and

g. ***Convene***c hurches and related organizations to work for human rights protections through international treaty bodies and the United Nations Human Rights Council; to work for the elimination of nuclear and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction, cooperating with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; and to seek ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty by their respective governments and monitor its implementation.

h. ***Reiterate*** its existing policy (2009 study) and reaffirm its support for the human right of conscientious objection to military service for religious, moral or ethical reasons, as churches have an obligation to support those who are in prison because they object to military service.

5. WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS

a. ***Adopt*** by 2015 and begin implementing binding regulations with targets for lowering greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the recommendations in the 2013 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;

b. ***Negotiate and establish***a ban on the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law;

c. ***Ensure*** that all remaining stocks of chemical weapons are destroyed under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention and cluster munitions are destroyed under the Convention of Cluster Munitions at the earliest possible date;

d. ***Declare***t heirsupportfor a pre-emptive ban on drones and other robotic weapons systems that will select and strike targets without human intervention when operating in fully autonomous mode;

e. ***Reallocate*** national military budgets to humanitarian and developmental needs, conflict prevention and civilian peace-building initiatives amongst others; and

f. ***Ratify and implement*** the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by 2014 and on a voluntary basis include weapon types not covered by the ATT.

God of life, guide our feet into the way of Just Peace!

Disarmament

- **Comment by WCC general secretary on international majority commitments to curb the potential use of cluster bombs and nuclear weapons, 29 November 2011**

The World Council of Churches welcomes two decisions just taken here in Geneva to protect human lives from lethal and indiscriminate weapons. Both decisions are heartening examples of a world majority of mostly small countries taking leadership for the common good when powerful states have failed to do so. Both address threats that churches have long decried.

On 25 November 2011, a United Nations arms control commission rejected a new law that would have allowed certain countries to keep and use cluster munitions that were banned four years ago by the Oslo Convention.

The next day the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement adopted a resolution about eliminating nuclear weapons. It calls all states to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used and commits the movement to build understanding of the "catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use" and the need for concrete actions to eliminate nuclear weapons.

As churches, we believe in the sanctity of life. As members of international civil society, we want to emphasize the importance of societies and nations standing together and establishing common standards when it comes to protecting lives put at risk by indiscriminate weapons.

The cluster munitions decision rejects a separate weaker law for countries such as the United States, China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Israel that would have given them the right to use weapons an international majority has already made illegal by treaty in 2008.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent decision commits a unique worldwide humanitarian movement to an issue that has moved more than 180 countries to pledge never to have nuclear weapons. It identifies questions with deep spiritual implications for all people, including how much suffering human beings are willing to inflict on others or allow to happen.

Both decisions represent specific victories for the international rule of law in the face of long-standing delays and opposition by a few major countries. Saving lives on a large scale requires that all countries live up to the same high standards.

These efforts deserve wide recognition and I am pleased to give my support in work and prayers.

- **Statement on the need for a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty, adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012**

Churches are witnesses to armed violence, assist the people it affects and share in the suffering it causes. Millions of lives are shattered or lost in armed violence each year, roughly two-thirds of them in countries ostensibly at peace. Badly regulated exports, imports and transfers of weapons must bear part of the blame. Unlawful and illegitimate use of such arms facilitates many forms of violence, intensifies armed conflicts, and undermines social and economic development**.**

After a century of progress in extending international legal protections to individuals and to peoples, there is still no universal treaty to control commercial transactions of conventional arms. Binding legislation is ever more urgent because, in an era of unprecedented military expenditures and burgeoning international trade, deadly weapons still change hands with less scrutiny than shipments of household appliances.

In 2009, after years of discussion, 153 governments including those with the largest trade in arms voted at the United Nations to negotiate “a legally binding instrument on the highest possible common international standards for the transfer of conventional arms”. This Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is to be negotiated in July 2012. Many governments have taken part in the preparations and in July 2011 they agreed on a summary of the key provisions to be negotiated into a future Arms Trade Treaty. A handful of important players, however, may obstruct the majority of governments and civil society groups that wish to build on the achievements of the ATT process as of 2011. There are differences over what to include in the term ‘arms’, what activities count as ‘trade’, and what details arms suppliers and recipients must report. Factors in play at a deeper level include the international status of

states, the commercial benefits of the arms trade and the military influence within governments.

A treaty to regulate the arms trade must address which arms change hands, how arms change hands, who the arms came from and where they end up. A treaty can help to reduce armed violence if it improves controls over the whole chain of suppliers, exporters, brokers, importers, recipients, and end-users. The best existing multilateral and national regulations indicate that the arms trade can be reformed.

Sovereign governments and the arms industry are essential parties in the development of an ATT. They both bear public responsibilities to populations that share a common destiny within an increasingly interdependent world. The ATT is about trade, yet the arms trade is not a normal business. Most states recognize the fact by imposing national controls. Similarly, more and more industries today are taking responsibility for the impact of their products and the arms industry must do likewise. States and arms manufacturers must recognize that the negotiation of the ATT presents a critical opportunity to protect a global public good.

The arms trade raises concerns that lie at the heart of Christian faith including belief in the sanctity of life, the commandment not to kill, and the biblical injunction to love one's neighbours. In that spirit, the World Council of Churches has repeatedly called churches to actions such as developing institutions that build security and wellbeing for all, denouncing militarism and promoting disarmament. In 1978, during the UN First Special Session on Disarmament, the WCC condemned the manner in which arms sales, and the flow of arms from richer countries, fuel conflicts in poorer countries. In 2001, the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs called governments at a major UN conference on the illicit trade in small arms "to control arms transfers in the context of and consistent with the obligations of states, including the obligation not to acquire arms for purposes other than or beyond levels needed for self-defence, to ensure the least possible diversion of resources to armaments, and to the obligation to protect the welfare and rights of its citizens". In 2005, the WCC executive committee called on governments to "negotiate a comprehensive and legally binding treaty" on arms transfers and to "ensure that any such Arms Trade Treaty sets clear criteria for compliance and verification". Member churches were also urged to advocate for "the adoption of an effective international Arms Trade Treaty". In 2011, the WCC central committee endorsed an ecumenical campaign on the Arms Trade Treaty.

Churches, church members and related organizations support a treaty that will ultimately save lives and protect communities which current trade practices put at risk. In order to reduce unlawful armed violence such a treaty must be both strong and effective. An ATT that is strong will apply to all categories of conventional weapons. It will also reinforce existing obligations of states to protect life under international law and other international norms. An ATT that is effective will have provisions for reporting, transparency, accountability and enforcement that serve to protect communities, nations and regions affected by poorly regulated transfers of arms.

The treaty provisions of key concern to the World Council of Churches are also important to a broad spectrum of civil society organizations and governments. Churches share the conviction that the treaty must include the following human-centered provisions. States must be legally bound to assess whether there is a substantial risk that a specific transfer of arms will be used to facilitate serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The treaty must require states to deny a license or other authorization

where there is a substantial risk that the transfer in question will seriously impair sustainable development or will perpetuate a pattern of gender-based violence. The treaty should also address the need for assistance to survivors of armed violence. The ATT must apply to the whole scope of conventional weapons because of the wide array of arms in use today and the fragmented nature of the international arms industry. The scope of the treaty should also be flexible to allow for future revisions to include new armaments.

The World Council of Churches affirms an Arms Trade Treaty as a legal instrument that has three complementary tasks. It must prevent arms transfers to states where the government poses a threat to its own people or to other states. It must improve trade controls so that, where there is a high risk of re-export or diversion to organized criminals or armed groups, arms smuggling and black market sales are reduced or stopped. The ATT must also serve to protect communities and save lives.

Therefore, affirming ecumenical engagement and advocacy for robust regulation of the arms trade, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012:

A. ***Commends*** the WCC member churches and related organizations taking part in the Ecumenical Campaign for a Strong and Effective Arms Trade Treaty;

B. ***Encourages*** other member churches to join the campaign and to cooperate with like-minded civil society associations and governments in advocacy for the treaty, and invites church representatives to sign the inter-faith declaration on the Arms Trade Treaty issued by the Control Arms Coalition;

C. ***Emphasizes*** that the Arms Trade Treaty must cover all types of conventional weapons and their components including small arms, light weapons, ammunition and parts, as well as police and security equipment; and allow for future revisions to include new weapons;

D. ***Encourages*** WCC member constituencies and networks to urge their respective governments to adopt an Arms Trade Treaty in which states are legally bound to deny an arms transfer where there is a substantial risk that the transfer: will be used to facilitate serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law; will seriously impair activities related to sustainable development; or will perpetuate a pattern of gender-based armed violence; and states address the need for survivor assistance;

E. ***Calls*** on governments to ensure that the treaty provisions for implementation, cooperation, monitoring and evaluation serve to assist all states parties in fulfilling the criteria of the treaty and in implementing its requirements;

F. ***Commends*** the July 2011 summary document of the ATT preparatory process as the basis for negotiating the Arms Trade Treaty, with stronger provisions for mandatory and comprehensive record-keeping and transparency, for international assistance and cooperation among states parties, and for survivor assistance;

G. ***Recommends*** that important decisions in the negotiation of the Arms Trade Treaty be reached using UN procedures in which consensus is achieved by a large majority after comprehensive deliberations;

H. ***Insists*** on the participation of representatives of civil society organizations as observers during the July 2012 Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty and in subsequent treaty conferences, maintaining the practice adopted during the preparation of the ATT or expanding it;

I. ***Extends*** support to the United Nations and other multilateral fora in their efforts to recognize and address the adverse relationship between expenditures on armaments and expenditures on economic and social development.

- **Joint statement by the leadership of the WCC, World Evangelical Alliance, Pax Christi International and Caritas, regarding the inclusion of ammunition in the negotiation of the first global Arms Trade Treaty, 20 July 2012**

Time is running out for governments negotiating the first global Arms Trade Treaty on a July 27 deadline. With thousands of people around the world killed or injured in armed violence each day, the governments' work will be judged by how many lives the treaty helps save.

Text on the negotiating table would ban arms sales for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, terrorist acts and grave human rights violations. Almost all of the 194 states involved recognize that the arms and ammunition most often used in these crimes must therefore be included in the treaty.

Yet if a few major countries do not change their negotiating positions, the proposed treaty will not include the ammunition or arms most often used to commit such crimes.

This small minority says they are not in favour of a treaty that regulates ammunition. That result would leave the door open for selling ammunition to those who commit such crimes – as it is now.

Churches and their members witness the human costs of unlawful armed violence every day. The women, children and men who are brought to church hospitals and church graveyards in different parts of the world usually have one thing in common. They have been struck down by ammunition.

The Arms Trade Treaty must regulate the projectiles that strike them down. There is no way ammunition can be omitted from the long-overdue regulation of a trade that has brought such suffering and death to millions of people. Existing national laws regulate ammunition with some success. The global Arms Trade Treaty needs to build on that success by doing the same and by cutting off the supply of bullets to illicit weapons already in use.

For people of goodwill and of faith, protecting human dignity and the sanctity of life are the real test of the Arms Trade Treaty. A strong and effective treaty can protect people from the insecurity, deprivation, fear and death caused by the unregulated and irresponsible trade in arms – but not if that treaty fails to regulate ammunition.

We support the majority of governments that want ammunition in the Arms Trade Treaty. We call for the few governments who oppose this common-sense treaty provision to join them and do their part for the common good.

Signatories:
Rev. Dr Walter Altmann, moderator, World Council of Churches
Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe, secretary general, World Evangelical Alliance
Dr Marie Dennis, co-president, Pax Christi International
Ambassador (ret.) Didier Destremau, disarmament spokesperson, Caritas

- **Statement of concern by WCC general secretary following the delay in the proposed adoption of a global Arms Trade Treaty, 27 July 2012**

A strong Arms Trade Treaty is urgent; governments must overcome new delay

A long-awaited global Arms Trade Treaty has been delayed just hours from the end of a six-year diplomatic process. Our concerns as churches go first to the people and communities waiting for protection from the unregulated arms trade. An estimated two thousand people are killed every day as a consequence of armed violence. An Arms Trade Treaty is urgently needed to save lives.

Governments gathered at the United Nations for the month of July to negotiate a treaty to control the international trade of all forms of conventional weapons. Regrettably, the long and difficult process has been postponed as the negotiations stalled and time ran out. Hope, however, remains for a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty, as next steps are presented to the General Assembly in the coming months.

For decades, churches around the world have been calling for an Arms Trade Treaty that would protect people from irresponsible arms transfers. We will not let go of this demand.

This past year the “Ecumenical campaign for a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty” has been working in more than 30 countries. Our goal is a treaty that saves lives by preventing sales or transfers of arms when there is a significant risk that the arms will be used in serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Similarly, the treaty must stop arms sales where they could be used in gender-based violence or to undermine development. The World Council of Churches-led campaign also calls for a treaty that covers all conventional weapons, including small arms and ammunition. It is critical that the treaty contains measures for effective implementation and compulsory public reporting. Churches will be following these processes carefully, and work with our partners to hold governments to account.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Joint communiqué adopted at the Humanitarian Disarmament Campaigns Summit, New York, U.S.A., 21 October 2012**

Working together to advance humanitarian disarmament

We represent non-governmental organizations and coalitions working in the field of humanitarian disarmament, with the shared objective of protecting civilians from the harmful effects of armed violence. We have come together on the 20th anniversary of the founding of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 1997 Nobel Peace laureate, to review and strengthen our collective work and to expand and further unite our community.

We support strong disarmament initiatives driven by humanitarian imperatives to strengthen international law and protect civilians. By advancing disarmament from a humanitarian perspective, we seek to prevent further civilian casualties, avoid socioeconomic devastation, and protect and ensure the rights of victims.

History has shown that the strongest and most significant disarmament achievements have been driven by humanitarian imperatives, as well as by the need to achieve the clearest and highest standards possible. These initiatives have involved genuine cooperation and substantive partnerships between governments, international organizations, and civil society. They have resulted in the complete prohibition of certain types and classes of weapons that cause unnecessary harm, such as antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions.

Humanitarian disarmament achievements are rarely the product of consensus decision–making, but rather created by the solid will of an overwhelming majority. Such approaches stand in stark contrast to processes where those few that want the least have been able to block the progress sought by the many.

Civil society plays a critical role in humanitarian disarmament. Our monitoring and research provides credible, first-hand information on the use of various weapons and the egregious harm they cause to civilian populations. Our advocacy leads to the creation and implementation of strong national and international standards. Our operations in affected countries protect civilians, support conflict recovery, and prevent and reduce armed violence.

We welcome the substantive progress that is being made with respect to existing international humanitarian disarmament treaties, but urge continued vigilance to ensure compliance with, full and effective implementation of, and universalization of these instruments.

The world faces an array of emerging and long-standing humanitarian disarmament challenges that must be tackled as soon as possible. But we cannot do this work alone.

We therefore call on all actors to stay focused on making existing humanitarian disarmament treaties work and use every opportunity to advance international law and practice to prevent harm to civilians.

We urge all states to:

- ***Adopt*** a proactive approach to tackle existing and emerging issues of concern in humanitarian disarmament by reviewing and strengthening policy and practice,

undertaking national measures, and intensifying diplomatic engagement and political leadership;

- ***Acknowledge*** that successful multilateral diplomatic work in humanitarian disarmament is best achieved when based on the will of the overwhelming majority of participating states;

- ***Recognize*** that civil society plays a vital role in tackling humanitarian disarmament concerns and work to accord a substantive role for civil society representatives in multilateral processes.

Signatories:
Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy Action on Armed Violence
Article 36
BioWeapons Prevention Project
Chemical Weapons Convention Coalition
Cluster Munition Coalition
Center for Civilians in Conflict
Ecumenical Campaign for a Strong and Effective Arms Trade Treaty, World Council of Churches
Fundació per la Pau Green Cross International Handicap International Human Rights Watch IKV Pax Christi
International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons International Campaign to Ban Landmines International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons International Committee for Robot Arms Control International Network on Explosive Weapons
Mines Action Canada
MAG (Mines Advisory Group)
Nobel Women's Initiative
Norwegian People's Aid
Oxford Research Group
Peace Boat
Peace Movement Aotearoa Physicians for Human Rights Protection
Strategic Concept for Removal of Arms and Proliferation (SCRAP) Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, president, Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs

- **Communiqué adopted at the international consultation on "Ecumenical advocacy to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa", Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24 November 2012**

We, the participants of the international consultation on "Ecumenical advocacy to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa"organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The meeting took place from the 23rd to 24th November 2012 in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia. We shared our experiences, expressed our concerns received expert inputs on the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), Africa's weapons of mass destruction. The consultation was an initiative of the CCIA, as part of the mandate and programme profile on

peace and human security, to provide a platform to discuss the impact of SALW proliferation in Africa.

The consultation was attended by various church representatives from Africa, members of church-related bodies as well as international experts from the Africa Union and other regional and international organizations on peace and security issues. The consultation was an opportunity to reflect on the role of churches in addressing concerns regarding SALW on the continent, and how to find collaborative ecumenical approaches among churches and church-related groups as well as the Africa Union, United Nations and other international and regional bodies so as to bring a meaningful response to the impact of SALW proliferation. The information received at the consultation was very useful to understand and appreciate the gravity of the problem of SALW proliferation in Africa.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW): an underestimated plight

We, the participants of the consultation, learned with dismay about the alarming impact of SALW on populations in Africa. SALW kill hundreds of thousands of innocent women and children as well as destroy the lives of the many youth every year and not forgetting the immeasurable and untold human suffering year in, year out in Africa. Rather than weapons of mass destruction, it is the multi-billion dollar business in global trade in SALW that kill many more people every day. This is primarily because SALW present several advantageous features – light, easy to conceal, use and maintain – that make them quite suitable for use in most current conflicts. The excessive accumulation, poor stockpile management and wide availability of SALW have aggravated tensions in many occasions: the resultant catastrophic consequences becomes more lethal and lasts longer, as a result of which a sense of insecurity grows, leading to a greater demand for these weapons.

The conference agreed that the proliferation of SALW contributes to gender inequality and violence against women around the world, and more particularly in Africa. In times of conflict, although male causalities at the war front tends to be higher, women experience a greater range of secondary consequences as well as direct injury and death: damage to livelihoods, nutrition, health and education bring additional burdens on women. Often women become the main breadwinners and caregivers in the family after the loss of their male relatives. They also become vulnerable to physical attack including gender-based and sexual violence.

With regard to children, it was observed that the fate of children in conflict-prone areas is very much shaped by SALW. They experience psychological trauma, lose parents and support communities, face displacement, abuse, exploitation, forcible military recruitment, interruption of education, sexual assault, and sometimes are physically injured or killed.

Sadly, it was noted that international progress towards combating the illicit trade in conventional arms has been very slow in Africa. The absence of a global framework to regulate the international trade in arms is the major reason behind the irresponsible weapons transfers and the lack of transparency and accountability. Many governments have voiced concern about the absence of globally agreed rules for all countries to guide their decisions on arms transfers. And so do the churches.

Biblical and theological basis for our prophetic witness

Isaiah 2:4:"*He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."*

The conference prayed that the vision of the Prophet Isaiah be realized in our time. Participants discerning the imperative of the word felt a compulsion and call to action because the present weight of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and unregulated arms transfers are ruining the lives of many and hampering the peace and security of the world. As co-creators with God, the conference agreed to continue the process of peace-building between nations and continue to help resolve disputes for many peoples in order that SALW shall be beaten into plowshares and their ammunition into pruning hooks. In this wise no nation shall lift up SALW against another or learn war, armed violence, human and drug trafficking, transnational organized crime any more.

Recommendations:
After their deliberations, the participants of the conference make the following recommendations:

1. ***Urge***the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches, The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), regional fellowships of Christian councils and churches and other Christian lay organizations/ACLA to take steps to institute a long-term ecumenical programme on SALW and the ATT that will facilitate churches to address the following:

- Constitute a pressure group to influence policy and processes at all levels
- Mount media campaigns to influence policy
- Facilitate church networks to be able to sensitize their own governments and communities
- Promote regional fellowships dialogue with regional economic communities
- Conduct studies and research into state of play by states (country profiling)
- Promote transformative masculinities that will dissociate SALW from masculine identity.
- Make every effort to have the issue of SALW and ATT on the agenda of the forthcoming WCC and AACC general assemblies in 2013.

2. ***Callon*** the ecumenical bodies to open dialogue with the Africa Union to establish how churches in Africa can collaborate with the Union to help address the issue of SALW and its negative impact on human life and property.

To the Africa Union:
3. ***Appeal to***the AU Peace and Security Commission to include the WCC in its circle of partners reflecting and responding to the SALW menace.

4. ***Request***the AU to include ecumenical bodies in the implementation of the "The African Union strategy on the control of illicit proliferation,circulation and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons" and run capacity-building programmes for the churches in SALW/ATT advocacy work.

To the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC):

5. ***Callon*** WCC to ensure increased advocacy on violation of women and children's rights as a result of SALW proliferation and misuse and the need for a sustained action by the Council to mitigate the impact thereof.

6. ***Commit*** to the need for an arms trade treaty (ATT) that will regulate irresponsible weapons transfer including SALW and related ammunition.

- **Public comment by the WCC general secretary on the adoption of the world's first Arms Trade Treaty, 3 April 2013**

We give thanks to God for the adoption of the world's first Arms Trade Treaty and for the efforts by a large majority of countries and many civil society groups to bring it into existence. The affirmative vote by 155 countries at the United Nations on 2 April is a milestone in efforts to bring commerce in deadly weapons under much-needed controls. It will help to preserve peace and protect communities from crimes and atrocities where illegal and unregulated weapons are used.

Churches in all regions share in the suffering caused by armed violence. We can all now give thanks that national authorities responsible for public safety and wellbeing have finally adopted binding regulations for the global arms trade.

This long-overdue act of international governance means that people in many parts of the world who live in fear for their lives will eventually be safer and more secure. The new treaty will reduce threats from violence linked to unscrupulous arms sales and trading.

I would especially like to thank the churches and related organizations in 40 countries who joined the "Ecumenical campaign for a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty" led by the World Council of Churches.

Together, we have helped in the long struggle to make the treaty strong and effective so that it can save lives and protect communities. Our first reason for doing so is to put a human face on the heavy scourge of armed violence. You have spoken out as part of your own societies, the international ecumenical community and international civil society, and in cooperation with the many governments convinced of the need for such a treaty.

From Syria to Democratic Republic of Congo, from Sudan to Colombia, our prayers will continue for people afflicted by violence and injustice. With them, we all need weapons to be controlled, given up and melted down into useful implements. So we will also pray and work for the new Arms Trade Treaty to come into effect, for states to live up to their treaty obligations and for the need to strengthen the rule of law in the years ahead.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for their Nobel Peace Prize award, 14 October 2013**

I would like to extend my congratulations to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for the unique and life-saving work that is recognized in the award of the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize.

This award is timely and compelling. It is timely because we have just seen at first hand the human suffering and trauma of chemical weapons use in Syria. Today the victims of chemical weapons in Syria, Iran and other countries are recognized along with the organization set up to help end such tragedies.

The award is compelling because peace is a shared responsibility today as never before. In our interdependent world it is fitting for the Nobel Peace Prize to go to an international organization. The governments cooperating through the OPCW finally to rid the world of a heinous class of weapons also share in this honour.

We pray that the award may prove to be a milestone. Since World War Two, the members of the World Council of Churches have joined people of good will and the vast majority of governments in calling for all weapons of mass destruction to be eliminated. We see such bans as an essential test of the international rule of law. Sadly, it is a test yet to be passed. The OPCW story gives us hope that the same leading nations who responded so quickly when chemical weapons were used in Syria will begin to show similar leadership over their own nuclear arsenals which are the world's worst weapons, and which have still not been banned.

We celebrate the work of peace today and pray for the safety and success of all who strive to carry it forward.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Nuclear weapons

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on the signing of the new strategic arms reduction treaty by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama, 8 April 2010**

The new U.S.-Russia nuclear arms reduction treaty signed today in Prague is news that the World Council of Churches has awaited for a long time: the achievement of a nuclear weapons agreement between the two most heavily armed nations in the world. We see this as a sign of the leadership needed for establishing a sustainable and Just Peace in the world. The two governments have negotiated rather modest cuts in the number of their most destructive weapons that they deploy. But the most promising element of their success is in also agreeing to be more open about their respective nuclear arsenals. If the world's most powerful states

practice new levels of nuclear transparency and verification, as we hope they will, they will be able to bring new leadership and hope to bear on a range of nuclear arms problems. New confidence between them can also pave the way for more and deeper cuts in their still-prodigious nuclear arsenals.

Signs of new openness are especially welcome now because another opportunity for success is near. Virtually all governments are coming to the United Nations next month to review the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the most important disarmament agreement of all. As the WCC governing body noted last September, "transparency is feasible, indispensable and long overdue" and much more of it is needed. We pray for governments to have the courage and the will to follow-up this important development.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Joint statement co-signed by the WCC presented at the NPT Review Conference on the reduction of tactical nuclear weapons, 14 May 2010**

Now is the time for action on "tactical" nuclear weapons
As the United States and Russia negotiate reductions in their arsenals of strategic nuclear weapons, the world is at an historic moment that provides unique opportunities to withdraw from deployment, reduce and eliminate the particularly destabilising class of short-range nuclear weapons variously described as non-strategic, sub-strategic, tactical or battlefield weapons.

The worldwide support for the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, the Obama administration's recognition of the importance of reducing the role of nuclear weapons, NATO's review of its Strategic Concept (scheduled for completion by November) and the intensified debate at the NPT Review Conference over the destabilising dangers of non-strategic nuclear weapons make it possible – and necessary – that meaningful steps towards the reduction of tactical nuclear weapons are taken now.

All NPT member states have the obligation to contribute to a world free of nuclear weapons by reducing their reliance on nuclear deterrence doctrines. A decision by NATO to withdraw the remaining, militarily obsolete U.S. tacticalnuclear weapons from European soil and provide security assurance with other means would be a significant and visible step in that direction which would make agreement on the elimination of those weapons more likely.

Recognizing that decisions about the future of tactical nuclear weapons and NATO's nuclear sharing policy will be agreed among NATO members, it must be noted how many NPT member states have spoken of the need to reduce and eliminate tactical nuclear weapons as a priority issue during this Review Conference. Nuclear sharing undermines NPT coherence because it creates a group of semi-nuclear states. In addition, a majority of NPT member states consistently criticise NATO nuclear sharing as violating at least the spirit of the NPT, and for undermining the overall credibility of the non-proliferation compact.

The United States is the only country still deploying nuclear weapons outside its territory. Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey are the only non-nuclear weapon states

that formally agree to host nuclear weapons on their territory. This deployment is a relic of the Cold War for which there is no strategic rationale.

Moreover, tactical nuclear weapons are a security liability because these weapons, many of which are small and widely deployed, could be vulnerable to acquisition and use, including attack or theft by terrorists.

Russia also possesses short range nuclear weapons. As with NATO, the deployment of these inevitably has strategic implications far beyond any battlefield for which they might be envisaged. Russia, like all NPT parties, has a responsibility to be part of the solution by supporting initiatives at the Review Conference aimed at the reduction and elimination of such weapons, and should also commit to withdrawing their own weapons from forward-areas of deployment in a verifiable and prompt manner.

We strongly welcome the increased attention that NPT member states have paid at this review conference to the importance of eliminating these particularly destabilising tactical nuclear weapons. We would like to contribute to the current consultations by suggesting steps states parties to the NPT can take in order to move this issue forward.

We urge all states parties to the NPT, NATO members and non-NATO members alike, to:

- ***reaffirm*** the 'diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies', particularly with regard to tactical nuclear weapons which were developed for battlefield use;

- ***declare*** that the deployment of nuclear weapons on others' territory, particularly innon-nuclear weapon states, undermines non-proliferation and disarmament efforts and that states should work towards ending existing nuclear sharing arrangements before the 2015 Review Conference, and to report on those efforts at that conference;

- ***declare*** that the NPT is binding on all states parties "under any circumstances", i.e., in times of war as well as peace;

- ***recognize*** the serious concerns raised by NPT parties about the compatibility of nuclear sharing arrangements with the Treaty, and that contradictory legal opinions dating back to the 1960s can no longer be treated as a legitimate basis for continuing to deploy U.S. nuclear weapons on the territory of non-nuclear-weapon states parties to the NPT;

- ***urge*** the nuclear weapon states to withdraw all nuclear weapons to their own territory, consolidate their tactical nuclear weapon stockpiles at safe and central storage sites and to open such facilities to transparency and verification measures as a confidence building measure, which would facilitate agreement on the verifiable and irreversible reduction and elimination of all tactical nuclear weapons at an early stage.

Sincerely,

Dr Rebecca Johnson, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
Nickolas Roth, Alliance for Nuclear Accountability
Daryl Kimball, Arms Control Association
Lisa Clark, Beati I contruttori di pace (Blessed Are the Peace-makers)
Paul Ingram, British American Security Information Council
Jonathan Frerichs, CCIA/World Council of Churches
Hans Kristensen, Federation of American Scientists

Dominic Moran, Greenpeace International
Susi Snyder, IKV Pax Christi
Regina Hagen, INESAP
Dr Oliver Meier, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy, Hamburg
Dr Ian Davis, NATO Watch
Hans Lammerant, Vredesactie (Belgium)

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Ambassador Helmut Hoffmann, permanent representative of Germany to the UN Conference on Disarmament, stressing the important role of Germany in the process of disarmament, 11 June 2010**

Your Excellency,

I would like to thank you and your government for the meeting with the World Council of Churches delegation during the recent NPT Review Conference in New York. We value such opportunities to engage governments who are part of a treaty that is the prevailing framework for stopping and reducing nuclear weapons.

Our delegation shared with you two positions the WCC, many other civil society organizations and a majority of governments also brought to the conference – agreeing to start a process leading to negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention, and up-dating and re-committing to the '13 Steps' of 2000. One could say that both positions fared relatively well in the initial stages but were weakened considerably by the end of the conference.

We take note of the points you made in our meeting. They inform our approach, including the view that such a convention is 'premature' at present and that revitalizing the 13 Steps, while positive, is 'only' disarmament. These were active issues during the conference and beyond, the essence of our response being that the often-mentioned 'peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons' is destined to remain in the realm of rhetoric unless treaty members come together to make conclusive progress on disarmament. In the view of a growing majority of governments and civil society, this would address the dynamic cause behind the recurring symptom of proliferation. Forty years into the NPT, such action would also be welcome as preparation for the day when nuclear weapons will be legally banned.

As our delegation mentioned, churches appreciate Germany's leadership with other governments in Europe in raising the question of tactical nuclear weapons still stationed there 20 years after the Cold War. We encourage your government in that regard, and are confident that the 'political' goals which sustain these militarily useless weapons can be addressed much more constructively by non-military measures available to all NATO states. Removing the weapons from non-nuclear-weapon states is among the next feasible steps in the still-halting journey toward the peace and security mentioned above. Even the weakened language in the NPT 2010 Action Plan can support such action. A copy of a statement we joined during the conference is attached for your information.

The need for "a new decade of disarmament" was mentioned in our meeting. We are confident that – in the EU, in NATO and here at the Conference on Disarmament – the German government has a leading role to play in achieving specific steps and linking them to

long-term goals. Please be assured of our interest and encouragement in efforts that, by curbing these weapons of mass destruction, reduce threats to life and enhance the will and the way of peaceful cooperation between nations.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from the WCC general secretary to H.E. Ambassador John Duncan, permanent representative of the United Kingdom to the UN Conference on Disarmament, stressing the important role of the United Kingdom in the process of disarmament, 11 June 2010**

Your Excellency,

I would like to thank you and your government for the meeting with the World Council of Churches delegation during the recent NPT Review Conference in New York. We value such opportunities to engage governments who are part of a treaty that is the prevailing framework for stopping and reducing nuclear weapons.

Our delegation shared with you two positions the WCC, many other civil society organizations and a majority of governments also brought to the conference – the need to agree to start a process leading to negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention, and up-dating and re-committing to the '13 Steps' of 2000. Both positions fared relatively well in the initial stages but were weakened considerably by the end of the conference. We regret that in the end, the disarmament portions generally did not reflect the will of the majority of governments whose obligations under the treaty have long been met. An opportunity has been missed for states parties to come together to address the pervasive root cause behind the recurring symptom of proliferation.

We take note of the points you made in our meeting. While a change of government was in process at the time, several efforts by the UK will continue to inform our outlook, in various areas, on what nuclear-weapon states can do. A solid example is verification work with Norway which demonstrates how actual disarmament can proceed without violating the NPT.

We also look forward to the prospect – mentioned in the light of the recent shifts in U.S. posture – of a UK re-evaluation of 'no first use' and of negative security assurances. Our delegates also heard some support on your part for institutional reform to make the NPT a more effective instrument. We have to ask if the pace of progress with current arrangements can measure up to the pace of events in a multi-polar world.

The need for "a new decade of disarmament" was noted by another of our delegation's meetings. We are confident that in the NPT and here at the Conference on Disarmament the UK government has a leading role to play among the nuclear-weapon states so that the international community will see concrete progress towards its long-standing goal of a world that is once again free of nuclear weapons.

Please be assured of our interest and encouragement in efforts that curbing these weapons of mass destruction, reduce threats to life and enhance the will and the way of peaceful cooperation between nations.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Public Statement to reconsider the role of nuclear weapons in NATO's Strategic Concept 2010 issued by the Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in cooperation with the WCC and Dutch IKV Pax Christi, Brussels, Belgium, 23 July 2010**

*"Abolishing nuclear weapons will be a long and complicated process that will require profound changes in the world and in people's minds. It would be an error to believe that a world free of nuclear weapons can simply be the world as we know it now, minus nuclear weapons. However, as churches we believe that the vision of a better world can help transform today's reality."*The Church and Society Commission of CEC, March 2010

1 . INTRODUCTION

For more than a year, ecumenical organizations with member churches in all member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have been encouraging NATO to use the opportunity of the revision of its Strategic Concept to change its nuclear posture, reinforcing the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.[55] In all statements NATO was specifically asked to withdraw the remaining ca. 200 U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from five NATO countries in Europe[56] and to end its policy of nuclear sharing. Russia was urged to address its own large arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons.

During the run-up to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in May 2010 in New York, the Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC)[57] published a statement proposing how the European Union could show greater European responsibility for nuclear disarmament.[58] With this new statement for NATO, informed by an expert meeting organized in Brussels on 8-9 June 2010 by CSC in co-

[55] Prior to NATO's 60th Anniversary Summit on 3-4 April 2009, the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and the Canadian Council of Churches sent a joint letter to NATO and its member states urging the Alliance to take new initiatives to this purpose. http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/messages-and-letters/30-03-09-letter-to-nato.html . The General Assembly of CEC in Lyon in July 2009 strongly supported the call for a world free of nuclear weapons as advocated by President Obama.
http://assembly.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/asse/Assembly/Documents/Official_documents/GEN_PUB_5_EN_NuclearWeapons_Final.pdf2.
In October 2009, the four organizations reiterated their call for NATO, and this time also the European Union and Russia, to reinforce the political dynamic towards global zero. http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/general-secretary/wider-ecumenical-movement-incl-wcc/letter-to-nato-eu-usa-and-russia-on-nuclear-disarmament.html.

[56] These are Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

[57] CEC is an ecumenical fellowship of 124 Anglican, Old-Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches from all over Europe. It also has 40 associated organizations. CSC of CEC links the membership with the European Union's institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and the UN (on European matters).

[58] The CSC statement for the EU policy to the 2010 NPT Review Conference: http://csc.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/csc/Nuclear_Disarmament/Final_CSC_of_CEC_Statement_on_the_EU_Policy_to_the_NPT_RevCon_2010.pdf. The Review Conference in New York was attended by a considerable number of church delegates.

operation with the World Council of Churches and Dutch IKV Pax Christi[59], CSC wants to further contribute to the reflection on NATO's nuclear policy as the Alliance is preparing its new Strategic Concept to be adopted at the Lisbon Summit on 19-20 November.

In this statement, after summarizing the churches´ debate on nuclear weapons, we will argue that NATO must overcome Cold War logic in addressing today's security challenges. We will offer five principles for a new nuclear policy which would allow the Alliance to put in practise its newly proclaimed commitment to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation[60] and to use its resources more effectively in order to foster peace and security. As in previous statements, the focus of our specific proposals will be on tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, while trying to put this issue in the broader context of Europe's security needs. We appeal to NATO to rethink 'deterrence' and security cooperation in Europe as two parts of the same coin. We welcome the policy of openness that NATO has practised in the revision process and hope that the Alliance will continue its dialogue with civil society and churches.

Churches and nucleardisarmament

As expectations rise for a world without nuclear weapons, existing strategic doctrines and military programs of nuclear deterrence need to be critically examined. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the requirements of maintaining a credible deterrence and those of reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons must become part of one and the same policy. Therefore, in our March 2010 statement to the EU we stressed that as churches we believe that hope must be transformed into reality, without fostering illusions. The road to 'zero' will not be easy. Although after the end of the Cold War the number of nuclear weapons has been reduced from ca. 70,000 in 1986 to ca. 23,000 in 2010, this amount is still beyond any comprehension and logic – and a continuing source of unacceptable danger. Today, the world worries about further proliferation of nuclear weapons and their potential use in regional conflicts and in terrorist attacks. At the same time, nuclear weapon states and their allies continue to regard nuclear deterrence as the cornerstone of their security. This posture persists despite the fact that nuclear history demonstrates that possession of nuclear weapons cannot be separated from their further proliferation.

The agreement among the churches that nuclear arms must never be used again unites the two main traditions in the churches' thinking on war and peace: pacifism and the 'just war' tradition. In the pacifist tradition this unconditional moral rejection is evident. In the 'just war' tradition it is based on the criteria of 'proportionality' (the military benefits of using nuclear weapons can never outweigh the evil done) and 'discrimination' (the unavoidability of indiscriminate killing in nuclear war).

Not all churches which stand in the 'just war' tradition share the same moral judgment of *possessing* nuclear weapons. However, there is a consensus that one should strive for a worldwithout the threat of nuclear weapons. As we concluded in our March 2010 statement to the EU, it is contradictory to our deepest beliefs and convictions that security should rely on a readiness to destroy the world which God has entrusted to humankind. To work for a world free of nuclear weapons is to work towards a respect of human dignity and the integrity of creation.

2 . NATO IN THE 21ST CEN TURY

[59] IKV Pax Christi is the joint peace organization of the ecumenical Dutch Interchurch Peace Council (IKV) and Pax Christi Netherlands.

[60] These goals were included in the North Atlantic Council's Declaration on Alliance Security given in Strasbourg/Kehl on 4 April 2009.

Time to overcome Cold War logic

Officially, the Cold War ended two decades ago with the historical political changes wrought by the citizens of Soviet-dominated countries in 1989, the changes in the Soviet Union itself, the OSCE *'Charter of Paris for a New Europe'* of 1990, and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991. Andindeed, today many former communist countries are democracies, the Cold War division of Europe is over, and the threat of a nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers seems something of a distant past.

However, relics of the Cold War and its logic stand in the way of adjusting to the new reality. Together, the U.S. and Russia possess 90% of the ca. 23,000 nuclear weapons in the world. The two countries cooperate in the management of existing nuclear stockpiles. The U.S. buys Russian military nuclear materials for civilian use in U.S. nuclear power plants. Yet, they are at great pains to agree even modest reductions in their strategic arsenals, including the necessary counting rulesand verification mechanisms. They seem to live in two different realities: a post-Cold War world of cooperation and a world still dominated by the Cold War logic of competition and enmity.

Europe is part of this problem. In addition to French and British nuclear weapons, five non-nuclear countries continue to host some 200 U.S. tactical nuclear weapons (TNW[61]) on their territory as a remnant of NATO's Cold War policy of 'nuclear sharing'. Today, NATO sees their role as 'political' but it has difficulty explaining how weapons that in NATO's deterrence strategy have virtually no *military* function[62]left can still *politically* deter an (unidentified) adversary. No longer aimed atexternal military threats, their political role addresses *internal* NATO matters such as symbolizing the U.S. commitment to the security of its European allies and the allies' desire to participate in NATO's nuclear planning.

Russia, on its side, keeps a huge arsenal of several thousand TNW, arguing that this is a compensation for an imbalance with NATO in conventional forces. Most of these TNW are old and raise doubts about safety.

Moreover, in many new member states of NATO memories of their own Cold War experiences are vivid and still hurting. Therefore, the challenge for NATO's new Strategic Concept is twofold. It must recognize the continued repercussions of Europe's Cold War history. Yet it must also move beyond the current pattern of addressing threats, 'new´ or 'old´, with Cold War concepts of deterrence that are obsolete. As to NATO's nuclear policy, rethinking NATO's nuclear posture for the future cannot be hostage to the Cold War logic of the past.

Time to move from 'detente' to cooperation

In 1967, NATO's famous Harmel Report restored consensus in a NATO that had been severely divided about its (and Europe's) future, by putting the traditional task of defence ('military security', 'to deter aggression') and the new challenge of 'detente' on equal footing. Although at the time controversial, the Harmel Report is now regarded as a major achievement of NATO. The 'detente' approach paved the way for the German 'Ostpolitik' that lead to 'normalization' of relations between West and East Germany, to the treaties of 1970-1972, and to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. However, at the same time NATO

[61] TNW, now often called 'sub-strategic', were originally also called 'battlefield' of 'theatre' nuclear weapons. Europe was the battlefield and the theatre. Today, the distinction between 'strategic' and 'tactical' can be seen as a Cold War heritage by itself, that may no longer be relevant in future arms control processes.

[62] The alert status of TNW has been reduced to months. The range of NATO's aircraft with nuclear strike roles is limited. Officials acknowledge that only under extremely remote circumstances could they still perform a military task.

modernized its military tasks of 'deterrence' and 'defence' by the doctrine of 'flexible response'[63], which remained central to NATO's strategy until 1991.

Today's frequent references to the Harmel Report as NATO's paradigm prevent the Alliance from developing a new post Cold War model. Europe is no longer defined by the antagonism between two blocks. NATO is no longer faced by the Cold War challenge of combining two seemingly contradicting tasks, as was the case with 'defence' and 'detente' in the 1960s. Now NATO's responsibility of territorial defence in the Euro-Atlantic region and providing security for the citizens in its member states is best served by investing in cooperation and confidence building in Europe and internationally. NATO faces the task of redefining 'extended deterrence'. In a new model for NATO, deterrence and security cooperation in Europe are no longer two different tracks but parts of the same coin.

Time for NATO to become "a dynamic and vigourous organization"?

After the end of the Cold War, the Strategic Concept of 1991 drastically changed NATO's nuclear posture. Furthermore, the unilateral Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991 and 1992 by PresidentsBush, Gorbachev and Yeltsin reduced TNW in Europe by 90%, on the side of the U.S., and by 75% by Russia. However, since then NATO has not revisited its nuclear policy[6410] and little seems to be expected from its new Strategic Concept of 2010.

NATO's 'Group of Experts', established in 2009, provided key input for the new Strategic Concept with its report of 17 May 2010. The report recognized that *"global leaders – including many fromAllied nations – have expressed a desire to move toward a world free from the threat posed by nuclear arms"*. However, instead of making recommendations toward this aim, it suggested further"*in-depth consultations on the future role of nuclear weapons in its (NATO's) deterrence strategy"*, thereby implicitly acknowledging that NATO is divided on this issue. In April, when the discussion on NATO's nuclear policy was launched at the informal foreign ministers meeting in Tallinn[65], U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton presented five principles that were more an effort to define an existing consensus than to contribute to a new debate.[66]

If the 2010 Strategic Concept stresses continuity for the next 10 years, NATO's nuclear policy would remain unchanged for three decades. This would totally contradict NATO's claim in the Harmel Report of 1967 of being *"a dynamic and vigorous organization which is constantly adaptingitself to changing conditions."* NATO needs a new nuclear policy, especially with regard to its TNW.

---

[63] 'Flexible response' replaced 'massive retaliation', which was no longer considered credible as deterring a conventional attack by the Warsaw Pact. 'Flexible response' wanted to have many more options available, both conventional and nuclear, at all levels of escalation. In the 'flexible response' debate especially the Federal Republic of Germany was concerned about nuclear war being limited to Europe, as this would mean, first of all, Germany. Another concern highlighted in the discussion was about the US nuclear guarantee; an issue which continues to be brought up any time NATO's nuclear policy is discussed.

[64] In the revision of the Strategic Concept in 1999 little was changed in terms of nuclear policy.

[65] We welcome the initiative taken by the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and Norway to have NATO's nuclear policy put on the agenda of the Tallinn meeting.

[66] The 'Clinton Principles', only made available to the media as excerpts from the speech by Secretary Clinton, are:
We should recognize that as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.
As a nuclear alliance, sharing nuclear risks and responsibilities widely is fundamental.
Our broad aim is to continue to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons. Of course, we recognize that in the years since the Cold War ended, NATO has already dramatically reduced its reliance on nuclear weapons
Allies must broaden deterrence against the range of 21st century threats, including by pursuing territorial missile defence, conducting Article 5 training and exercises, and drafting additional contingency plans to counter new threats to the Alliance.
In any future reductions, our aim should be to seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members, and include non-strategic nuclear weapons in the next round of US – Russian arms control discussions alongside strategic and non-deployed nuclear weapons.

3 . ADOPTING A 21ST-CENTURY NUCLEAR POLICY

As noted above, the churches across the countries of NATO would like to see the total elimination of nuclear weapons in the foreseeable future, and for NATO to make a clear commitment to work towards the global zero. The churches maintain that nuclear weapons must no longer be allowed to serve as a claim to global power. For the churches the continued reliance on nuclear weapons is a fundamental moral problem, as it implies that peace and security require the readiness for mass destruction. These weapons, not only their use but their whole life cycle, also raise serious environmental concerns. In addition, many church statements question the compatibility of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements with the spirit if not the letter of the NPT.

At the same time, whereas the churches have no illusions that NATO would adopt a deterrence posture without a nuclear component in the near future, we believe that the role of its ca. 200 TNW can be ended. Given that all policy changes within NATO require consensus, we want this paper to offer ideas for concrete and feasible next steps to take the process toward a world free of nuclear weapons forward. We will first formulate some principles for NATO's nuclear policy at large, then enter into the debate about possible scenarios for dealing with NATO's remaining TNW. We are aware that this discussion is likely to be carried on in more detail in 2011.[67]

Principles of a new nuclear policy for NATO

1. **NATO states its commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons and contributes to global moves towards reducing nuclear threats on the road to zero.**
If it is assumed that, as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO's deterrence policy will continue to have a nuclear component, then NATO is also challenged to make a clear commitment in its new Strategic Concept to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

2. **NATO reduces its dependency on nuclear deterrence and instead adopts an approach where security is based less on nuclear deterrence and more on co-operation.**
NATO should further reduce its dependency on nuclear deterrence and have its security needs increasingly addressed by non-nuclear means. This includes, most importantly, a hard-nosed cooperation, even with potential adversaries, in order to eventually escape deterrent relationships. In this strategy, efforts to build greater cooperation – based upon shared interests – would explicitly complement (and be part of) protection and security assurances.

3. **Ending nuclear sharing is part of a wider reform in which NATO makes itself more efficient in addressing today's security needs**
NATO should rethink the division of labour among its member states in order to best match its security needs with available resources. It should acknowledge that nuclear sharing is a very expensive way to deal with internal concerns about the U.S. commitment to the security of its allies and the wish of NATO allies to take part in nuclear planning. These needs can be addressed in new ways.[68]

[67]The Nuclear Planning Group meeting of the ministers of defence in Brussels on 10-11 June briefly discussed the idea of a NATO Nuclear Posture Review next year, after the new Strategic Concept has been decided.

[68] The request for new security assurances by some member states could be met by a clear new signal from the United States that it does take responsibility for the security of its European allies. The assurances could, for instance, take a form of a 'Washington Declaration' endorsing the guarantees provided by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949. The issue of participation in nuclear planning would be solved if the Alliance agreed on a comprehensive approach with regard to risks

The withdrawal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from Europe and ending nuclear sharing would be a move which would allow NATO and the five current hosting countries to redirect scarce resources to undertakings which contribute positively to enhancing peace and security.

4. **The sole purpose of NATO's nuclear deterrence policy is to deter a nuclear attack by other countries**

NATO should reduce the role of its nuclear weapons and in the Strategic Concept of 2010 announce that the only purpose of NATO's deterrence policy is to deter the use of nuclear weapons against NATO member states.[69] This would be an important first move to be followed by the adoption of a no 'first use policy'.

5. **By taking its own steps in the area of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation NATO creates conditions for countering proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.**

NATO has a lot to offer for international arms control. The ending of nuclear sharing policies would improve NATO's credibility by dispelling any criticism concerning the compatibility of the nuclear sharing arrangements with Art. I and II of the NPT. It would send a strong signal in the support of the NPT regime and thereby enable the development of peaceful and friendly international relations (Art. 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty). The responsibility for NATO to act in this area derives, not least, from the fact that of the world's 14 states with nuclear weapons on their soil, 8 are NATO member states.

Three scenarios to change or end nuclear sharing

Currently, various ways are being discussed in which NATO could deal with its remaining U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. Theoretically, the two extreme positions are to retain the status quo and to end NATO's nuclear deterrence posture altogether. Both are unlikely.

Retaining the status quo would mean that NATO would fail to put into practice its newly proclaimed commitment to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. It would ignore the opinion of Germany and other member states about TNW being relics of the Cold War that need to be withdrawn. It would leave the issue of modernization of aging dual capable aircraft (DCA) unresolved. It would not solve safety concerns about the storage sites except perhaps by very costly measures. It would in no way address the criticism as to the (non-) compliance with the NPT. NATO would remain divided. At the other end of the continuum, the prospect of ending all nuclear elements in 'extended deterrence' is remote, as there is consensus among the Alliance about the U.S. nuclear guarantee being the pinnacle of NATO's deterrence strategy.

In the following paragraphs we will contribute to this discussion by looking at three other scenarios as to the future of NATO's TNW.[70] We will particularly look at the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation effects of the following scenarios.

---

and responsibilities and the division of labour: If it was willing to share the responsibility for and risks related to, all of the tasks and policies it takes on board (including nuclear policy). If it practiced a division of labour in the most feasible and cost-effective way as a matter of mutual benefit. And if it agreed that non-participation in a specific area of work does not exclude from policy planning or decision-taking in that area.

[69] Whereas the U.S. TNW in Europe no longer have this deterrence value, it is provided by the strategic US and UK nuclear weapons assigned to NATO.

[70] The option of reducing numbers only while leaving nuclear sharing as it is now is too close to the status quo to merit discussion here. We also leave out the option of simply concentrating nuclear weapons to fewer locations, most likely Italy and/or Turkey, as too problematic.

1. All bombs relocated in the United States – other nuclear sharing arrangements remain as before

In the first scenario, the U.S. TNW are withdrawn from Europe but other nuclear sharing arrangements remain. The hosting countries provide the infrastructure, related personnel and their training, and in several countries the dual capable aircraft and pilots. The very limited military role of these weapons, maintenance of the related infrastructure and the theoretical option of returning them would counter most arguments criticizing a decrease in the nuclear deterrence provided by the U.S. to its European NATO allies.

To some exten,t this change could be considered a non-proliferation measure as it would somewhat diminish doubts about non-compliance with the NPT. Secondly, the storage of these nuclear weapons in the United States would address heightened safety demands in a more cost-efficient way. However, this kind of change could not be marked as a long term disarmament step. Nor would it allow for major financial savings. It would retain the Cold War logic of NATO's nuclear policy and it would not encourage other countries to follow suit with non-proliferation measures or to proceed with nuclear disarmament.[71]

2. All bombs relocated in the United States – only the U.S. provides dual capable aircraft (DCA)

Also in this second scenario all remaining U.S. TNW are withdrawn from Europe, but only the U.S. provides DCA for nuclear missions with TNW. Some nuclear sharing arrangements remain including some infrastructure and its related personnel and training. The costs of infrastructure would be lower than in the first scenario. Moreover, this arrangement would spare the nuclear sharing countries from the replacement of their aging DCA and thus allow substantial savings.

This measure would allow NATO to demonstrate support for the NPT regime, dispelling more of the criticism than in the first scenario concerning nuclear sharing and its compatibility with the NPT. Yet again, this change would not amount to a major disarmament step as TNW would keep their role in NATO's new extended deterrence concept. Most probably it would not serve as an incentive for other countries to proceed with disarmament and non-proliferation measures.

3. The end of nuclear sharing arrangements in NATO and the eliminations of its TNW

In the third scenario, nuclear sharing comes to an end. All remaining U.S. TNW are withdrawn from Europe without the option of returning these weapons. The current hosting countries no longer provide infrastructure or related arrangements.

This would constitute a non-proliferation measure which would end all doubts concerning art. I and II of the NPT. It would reduce the number of countries in the world with nuclear weapons on their soil from 14 to 9. It would count as a real disarmament measure and could add pressure on other countries to take such steps. All in all, NATO would send a strong signal in the support of the NPT regime and thereby for the development of peaceful and friendly international relations (Art. 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty). Moreover, it would allow for more effective use of money to address today's, rather than yesterday's needs.

[71] We are aware that there may not be a direct relation between the steps NATO could make in abolishing its TNW and the ambitions of some countries to acquire nuclear weapons. Still, non-action on the side of NATO with regard to nuclear disarmament, in the current political momentum toward zero, is quite likely going to weaken the credibility of NATO non-proliferation measures and of non-proliferation policy in general.

4 . ADDRESSING RUSSIAN TNW

Although the issue of the future of NATO's TNW is primarily a problem within NATO itself, consensus in NATO would be helped if Russia was willing to address its own vast arsenal of TNW. Formally, all three scenarios for NATO would meet Russia's condition that TNW can only be discussed when the U.S. no longer deploys nuclear weapons outside its own territory. However, the third scenario would put the onus on Russia most clearly.

In the discussions with Russia, for which the NATO-Russia Council offers an appropriate arena, the first priority would be the reduction of nuclear threat by increasing transparency and relocating Russian sub-strategic weapons away from the territories close to NATO members. Considering the Russian view that its TNW are a compensation for its conventional military weakness compared to NATO and the U.S., reducing and eventually eliminating Russian TNW is more likely in the broader context of re-invigorated CFE talks and agreements about missile defence.

We consider it vital that Russia be engaged in confidence-building and transparency measures that build upon the common interest in moving towards a more peaceful Europe and a world free of nuclear weapons, a goal towards which Russia has also committed itself. We believe that it is in Russia's interest to build good relations with the former Warsaw Pact countries. We believe that NATO and Russia share the concern over the safety of nuclear arsenals and that it is also in Russia's own interest that TNW be moved to more central locations and eventually eliminated.

Whereas we consider it crucial to maintain an active dialogue with Russia, and work towards a new security concept based on co-operation, we believe that the withdrawal of U.S. TNW from Europe should not be made dependent of an agreement with Russia.

6. RECONCILIATION IN EUROPE

It is not new in Europe's history that reconciliation is both a political and a moral challenge. This is certainly the case after a century with two world wars and a prolonged Cold War. Moving away from the dependency on nuclear weapons, reducing the nuclear threat, and eventually reaching the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons can only be part of a broad and long process that will entail much more than a focus on one category of weapons. Such a focus may even be distracting if it is not embedded in this broader process. As churches we believe that the challenges of peace, reconciliation and justice are also challenges for NATO as a secular organization. We believe that these challenges also involve the countries in Europe that are not part of NATO. We are willing to contribute to this broader process of building peace.

- ## Public statement by WCC general secretary on the 65th Anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 5 August 2010

Again we mourn the people who died from the atomic bombings of 1945 and extend our solidarity and resolve to those who survive.

The pain of this important anniversary is threefold. There are the shattered families, recurring traumas and unnatural deaths that have affected hundreds of thousands of people of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is the fact that, 65 years on, nuclear bombs still threaten humanity and deny a lasting peace. There is also the legacy that since 1945 the world is divided into two camps – a handful of states that assert the right to have weapons of mass annihilation and the majority of states that do not.

Such inequity and division is not the heritage of humanity. The Bible urges us to "choose life" so that all may live. As if in response, 65 years after Hiroshima, more and more people are working to rekindle the vision of a world without nuclear weapons. More than 4,000 mayors from 144 countries have joined the mayors of the bombed Japanese cities in an association called Mayors for Peace. They insist that "Cities are not targets". In several nations, elder statesmen and former military generals have reversed lifelong positions and come out for nuclear abolition. On several continents, parliamentarians, physicians, lawyers and scientists are campaigning with their peers for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

In different countries around the globe people of faith are standing together for a world without nuclear weapons. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and member churches are promoting ratification of a new arms control agreement between Russia and the U.S., rejuvenation of disarmament forums and reform of NATO's nuclear policy. The WCC and churches from Australasia to Africa have helped governments establish nuclear-weapon-free zones that now cover 116 countries and more than half the world. The ecumenical community is also preparing for an international convocation in May 2011 in Jamaica on the pursuit of "Just Peace", a peace where there is no place for weapons that put humanity and the planet at risk.

In 2010, the atomic bomb survivors of 1945 continue to live lives of courage and endurance, witnessing to the hope that no one will ever again suffer as they have suffered. For the first time this year, the Secretary General of the United Nations will honour them with his presence at the memorial ceremonies in Hiroshima. The United States will send an ambassador for the first time also. One hopes that the other nuclear-armed governments might be represented as well.

On August 6th and August 9th we turn our hearts toward the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, asking God to bless governments and citizens with new resolve to protect the sanctity of life.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary on the ratification of the new strategic arms reduction treaty, 23 December 2010**

It is heartening that 20 years after the end of the Cold War, the United States has ratified a verifiable new treaty to reduce nuclear arsenals. Such a decision is especially meaningful in what is for Christians the season of peace. With member churches around the world we thank God for this small but significant demonstration of progress on a problem that continues to deny the hopes of people everywhere.

We also welcome cross-party support in one nation for a decision that concerns all nations. The U.S. and other nuclear powers do not possess weapons of mass destruction in isolation. They do so against the best interests of humanity.

The New START treaty not only sets practical goals to reduce warheads and launchers. It also sends a signal that governments can do more than block international progress year after year for narrow national interests. Progress is long overdue on another step that President Obama and many other leaders link to the vision of a world without nuclear weapons – a treaty to stop production of fuel for nuclear bombs. It has been stalled at the Conference on Disarmament here in Geneva for years. In nuclear disarmament as in climate change, when powerful countries provide leadership with accountability their example helps others to do likewise.

The ratification by Russia of the New START treaty would be a welcome start to 2011. We pray that the New Year will see more such news that is good news for all.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Follow-up letter to the president of the U.S.A., the president of the Russian Federation, and the NATO secretary general, on the adoption of NATO's strategic concept and next steps, 11 March 2011**

The letter was issued jointly by the World Council of Churches, Conference of European Churches, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the Canadian Council of Churches.

On the eve of the NATO summit in Strasbourg/Kehl (April 2009), where NATO decided to develop a new strategic concept, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the Canadian Council of Churches called upon NATO and its member states to endorse the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.[72] In our letter, we emphasized that a very important measure toward this end would be the withdrawal of the last remaining 150 – 200 U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from five non-nuclear NATO countries in Europe.[73].

This call was reiterated in another letter by our four councils to NATO on 28 October 2009, which was also addressed to the leaders of the European Union, the United States of America and the Russian Federation.[74] Statements urging the withdrawal of U.S. weapons were also made by councils individually, including a statement by the General Assembly of CEC in July 2009.[75] In March 2010, on the basis of this statement, CEC – through its Church and Society Commission (CSC)[76] – presented detailed proposals to the European Union as it was preparing its policy for the 2010 NPT Review Conference in New York (May 2010). In July

[72] WCC has 249 member churches all over the world. CEC has 125 member churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA 37 member churches and the Canadian Council of Churches 22 member churches.
[73]http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/messages-and-letters/30-03-09-letter-to-nato.html .
[74]http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/wider-ecumenical-movement-incl-wcc/letter-to-nato-eu-usa-and-russia-on-nuclear-disarmament.html .
[75]http://assembly.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/asse/Assembly/Documents/Official_documents/GEN_PUB_5_EN_NuclearWeapons_Final.pdf2.
[76] The Church and Society Commission of CEC links the member churches with European institutions including NATO.

2010, in the context of the revision of NATO's strategic concept, this was followed by another detailed document by CSC presented to NATO and its member states with specific proposals for NATO's future nuclear policy.[77]

After the adoption of the new strategic concept at the Lisbon summit on 19 November 2010, we cannot but be disappointed by its nuclear paragraphs.[78] While we welcome NATO consensus on *"the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons"*, we feel that this commitment is watered down by what follows immediately thereafter: *"as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance*." It is possible that NATO remaining a nuclear alliance only applies to the three nuclear weapon states that are NATO members.[79] However, the strategic concept provides no indication of whether NATO's existing nuclear sharing policy for tactical nuclear weapons will change, as we and many others have advocated. More specifically, although the Alliance says it wants to enhance international security by *"contributing actively to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament"*, thereby affirming its earlier commitment at the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit, it failed to endorse the policy goal of Germany supported in various ways by other member states, to withdraw U.S. tactical nuclear weapons.

These former 'battlefield nuclear weapons' are remnants of Cold War strategies, when Europe was considered the battlefield. We maintain that, 20 years after the end of the Cold War, NATO should rethink deterrence and security cooperation in Europe and decrease its reliance on nuclear weapons. By withdrawing these tactical nuclear weapons from Europe NATO is contributing concretely to nuclear arms control. By eliminating this class of nuclear weapon based in non-nuclear-weapon states of Europe, NATO enhances the credibility of its arms control and non-proliferation policy in three ways: (a) NATO seizes the opportunity to reduce the number of countries in the world with nuclear weapons on their territory from 14 to 9; (b) NATO addresses doubts about its members' compliance with Articles I and II of the NPT which prohibit any transfer of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states; and (c) NATO denies other countries the opportunity to acquire nuclear weapons by using a similar deterrence rationale.

We recognize that no final decisions on nuclear policy were made at the Lisbon Summit. Instead, the Alliance will *"continue to (…) review NATO's overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance, taking into account changes to the evolving international security environment."* We understand that during this review process serious discussions about the future of NATO nuclear policy will take place. The enduring commitment to nuclear disarmament of our Councils of Churches is a reflection of the national majorities in favour of nuclear disarmament across the member states of NATO. Thus we welcome the forthcoming close examination of NATO nuclear policy as a new opportunity for change that is long overdue and widely anticipated.

Therefore, we urge NATO and its member states to consider the following recommendations during the deliberations on the 2011 Defence and Deterrence Review:

---

[77] http://csc.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/csc/Nuclear_Disarmament/Final_CSC_of_CEC_Statement_on_the_EU_Policy_to_the_NPT_RevCon_2010.pdf and http://csc.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/csc/Nuclear_Disarmament/Final_CSC_Statement_on_NATO_s_Strategic_Concept_2010.pdf

[78] In our comments below we have taken into account the relevant parts of the Lisbon Summit Declaration that accompanied the new Strategic Concept.

[79] As the text makes clear, *"the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance"*.

- **First, NATO commits itself, as an initial step, to the same declaratory policy that has been adopted in the 2010 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review.**

This would mean that NATO "*will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations*."[80] We welcome that the new Strategic Concept provides an opening for this change, as compared with the previous Strategic Concepts of 1991 and 1999, NATO's declaratory policy in the 2010 text no longer includes the purpose of its nuclear weapons as *"to prevent (…) any kind of war."*

- **Second, NATO reduces its reliance on the role of nuclear weapons in its overall security strategy.**

By reducing the reliance on nuclear weapons in its defence and deterrence strategy, NATO members will partially fulfil their standing obligation under the NPT "*To further diminish the role and significance of nuclear weapons in all military and security concepts, doctrines and policies*".[81]

- **Third, NATO ends the 'nuclear sharing' policy of the Alliance, and implements the withdrawal of the remainingU.S. TNW from Europe.**

Effectively, this would imply a recommendation in the Defence and Deterrence Review to end the nuclear tasks of all non-nuclear NATO member states. The new strategic concept provides an opening for such change: though reaffirming the need for the participation of Allies in collective nuclear defence planning and peacetime basing of nuclear forces, it omits the phrase in the 1991 and 1999 documents that these should be based in Europe.[82]

- **Fourth, NATO de-links its decisions on tactical nuclear weapons from the policies of Russia.**

Though no formal 'linkage' has been established between NATO reductions and reductions of Russia's much larger arsenal of TNW – instead, NATO aims to "*seek Russian agreement"* on transparency and relocation to centralized storage of nuclear weapons – the danger exists that such a linkage will *de facto* become part of the process. In our earlier statements we have also advocated Russian transparency and relocation. However, NATO must make its own decisions and not be tied to potentially lengthy and very complex bilateral negotiations.

- **Fifth,we appeal to NATO to recognize the current dangers of proliferation, to NATO members to live up to their current commitments to non-proliferation, and for the alliance to change its policy and actions accordingly**.

NATO's new nuclear policy should fully comply with the commitment by all NATO member states at the 2010 NPT Review Conference "*to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons*".[83]

[80] U.S. Nuclear Policy Review, April 2010:
http://www.defence.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf .
[81] NPT/CONF.2010/50, Conclusions and Recommendations for follow-on action, B, Action 5.
[82] The absence of this phrase in the new Strategic Concept certainly illustrates the division on nuclear sharing policy across the Alliance.
[83] NPT/CONF.2010/50, Conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions, I,A, Action 1.

NATO and its member states should seize the opportunity of the Defence and Deterrence Review in 2011 to take bold steps and end the anachronistic policy of nuclear sharing including the deployment of U.S. TNW in Europe.

We also urge Russia to reduce and relocate its own TNW without making NATO nuclear withdrawal a pre-condition. This would be a confidence building measure generally and would address the concerns of some of its neighbouring states. It would also make a substantive contribution to a safer Europe and the vision of a nuclear weapon free world.

We urge both NATO and Russia to be fully transparent about numbers and locations of their TNW.

Finally, we want to express our appreciation for NATO's willingness to involve civil society during the development of its new Strategic Concept. We regret that a similar decision was not announced in the Lisbon documents and we appeal to NATO to continue this policy of encouraging open debate. We believe that closed-door discussions do not serve NATO's desire to become more transparent to the citizens whose interests it seeks to serve.

We are also addressing this letter to the president of the Russian Federation and the Secretary General of NATO.

We look forward to your response, to further discussions with your governments and NATO, and to shared progress in resolving these important concerns.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita
Interim general secretary
Conference of European Churches

Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon
General secretary
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Rev. Dr Karen Hamilton
General secretary
Canadian Council of Churches

cc: Ambassadors of NATO member states to NATO Headquarters

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on the 66th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 6 and 9 August 1945, 5 August 2011**

We cannot live with such dangers

In spite of the atomic bombing, we survivors were able to begin to see the meaning of our survival and transcend our personal tragedies. We became convinced that no human being should ever have to repeat our experience of inhumanity, illegality, immorality and cruelty of atomic warfare." (Setsuko Thurlow, who was a 14-year-old schoolgirl in wartime Hiroshima 66 years ago.)

Each August, with an abiding sorrow and some reasons for hope, our thoughts turn to those who suffered the annihilating atomic bombings of 1945. The witness of Mrs Thurlow, was brought to the World Council of Churches International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May this year. Her lifelong courage and conviction drew us into the hope at the heart of Just Peace. Surely the finest memorial to the half million casualties of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would be to eliminate nuclear weapons during the lifetime of the remaining survivors like her.

For as long as nuclear weapons exist, each year brings us new reasons to build a world where such a tragedy can never happen again. Last December the world saw a small step forward when the U.S. and Russia ratified a verifiable new treaty to reduce their nuclear arsenals slightly. The past year, with a push from civil society including churches, a solid majority of governments are on record for the first time in support of a specific convention or similar agreement to ban all nuclear weapons.

Yet here in Geneva, there was backsliding and deadlock once again at the Conference on Disarmament, where 65 governments regularly gather with a mandate for such negotiations. The nine countries that have nuclear weapons – plus a few tempted to join them – continue to block progress for everyone.

Despite debt and financial crises, the nine nuclear-weapon states are also modernizing their nuclear arsenals at a rate that will cost one trillion dollars over the next decade, said a civil society study released in June. Such actions will guarantee that nuclear weapons exist indefinitely.

Again this year, on behalf of churches in the member states of NATO, the WCC, the Conference of European Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the Canadian Council of Churches urged the NATO alliance to withdraw the last U.S. nuclear weapons stationed in Europe and reduce its overall reliance on nuclear weaponry.

The Fukushima disaster in March spread radiation in the wake of devastation that destroyed cities and killed thousands of people. Churches in Japan are helping the survivors and preparing to monitor the government's nuclear policies more closely.

The WCC peace convocation in May embraced the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I when he called the churches to reflect God's love for the world. "Our present situation is in at least two ways quite unprecedented," Patriarch Bartholomew said. "First, never before has it been possible for one group of human beings to eradicate so many people simultaneously; second, never before has humanity been in a position to destroy so much of the planet environmentally. We are faced with radically new circumstances, which demand of us an equally radical commitment to peace."

His words give voice to the worldwide ecumenical community: "As churches we cannot accept two threats so terrible; as members of the human family we cannot allow two dangers so great to go unanswered".

Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
World Council of Churches general secretary

- **Joint letter to the president of the UN Conference on Disarmament, affirming the need for substantive work by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, 9 March 2012**

Excellency,

This letter is a response to your 24 February 2012 letter as president of the Conference on Disarmament to civil society organizations. Several of the recipient organizations are members of the NGO Committee for Disarmament here in Geneva. As chair of the committee, I would like to respond with thanks for your letter, for the concern it conveys about the Conference on Disarmament and for its recognition of civil society contributions.

Our committee members are active in various ways in advancing the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. The question your letter raises for us is how best, under current circumstances, to contribute to that goal by further engagement with the CD. Our common outlook on this matter might be characterized as follows:

We wholeheartedly affirm the need for a substantive CD. We share your sentiments about the ever-more urgent need for the CD to once again realize its potential. In the renaissance of nuclear abolition that began five years ago, a variety of different actors have generated momentum and made specific achievements. The world's sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum has yet to earn a place among those actors, in the momentum they are generating or on the list of achievements so far. We would dearly wish to see the CD and its unique contribution there.

It is clear that ample opportunities for progress exist. Organizations on the committee and their networks are taking advantage of current opportunities to promote nuclear disarmament. In the past three months, examples include a global poll outlining the government majority in favour of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, a diligent compilation of states parties' fulfilment of the NPT 2010 Action Plan, a new study urging divestment from the 20 businesses most heavily invested in making nuclear weapons, greater outreach and awareness-raising among youth, reframing exercises that debunk the myths that protect nuclear weapons and much more. Opportunities for progress exist, surely also at the CD.

How to encourage progress at the CD has become a source of frustration and puzzlement. Rich resources for moving forward on nuclear disarmament are now available in the international community. Chief among them is the conviction that a comprehensive approach is now necessary and possible, a shift in thinking that is reflected in the 2010 NPT Action Plan's reference to a framework of agreements. Meanwhile, with the passage of time, the once-urgent goals on the aging agenda of the CD have begun to look piecemeal and inadequate by comparison. Many, many efforts – by CD presidents, member states and civil society -- have not been able to rescue these important but unfinished initiatives in each of the CD's work areas. Despite a widely felt commitment to progress, how to encourage it at the CD has become a source of considerable frustration.

Your letter welcomes contributions toward the ongoing effort to resuscitate the CD. We share the underlying commitment to multilateral disarmament and on that basis are willing to discuss the matter. Given the history this forum has written for itself, however, the question we have is: How to make a meaningful contribution?

For example, it is a widely held view that at this point in disarmament history a robust programme of work would do well to include dynamic combinations of issues that provide for progress on both disarmament and non-proliferation. One such dynamic especially relevant for the CD and recommended by various civil society organizations is an FMT-NSA combination.

We know that progress is possible even as we also need to air these concerns at the missed opportunities which beset the CD. Members of the NGO Committee often meet with governments, have met with the CD presidency in the past and would be willing to do so again to discuss viable prospects for progress. We would ask you to please let us know if such a meeting would be constructive from your side.

One item for such a meeting could be to assess with you the value of a wider discussion, since each year there has normally also been an opportunity for representatives of the committee to interact with the presidents of the CD as a group.

We appreciate your efforts on behalf of the CD and wish the 2012 presidency every success in re-focusing the institution on its mission.

Sincerely yours,
Jonathan Frerichs
Chair, NGO Committee for Disarmament
Program executive, Peace-building and Disarmament
CCIA/World Council of Churches

NGO Committee for Disarmament members with offices in Geneva:
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom/Reaching Critical Will
International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
Quaker UN Office
International Peace Bureau
Soka Gakkai International
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
Mayors for Peace
IFOR
Rissho Kosei-kai
INESAP
World Council of Churches

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Dmitry Medvedev, president of the Russian Federation, on the issue of Russian tactical nuclear weapons, 27 March 2012**

Dear Mr President,

In the renewed international debate about the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, a crucial step has been the joint statement in London by you, Mr President, and U.S. President Barack Obama on 1 April 2009, in which the Russian Federation and the U.S.A. committed

themselves to a nuclear-weapon-free world. The new international engagement on this issue that has arisen over the last five years has been strongly endorsed by churches and ecumenical organizations around the world with a long history of advocating for total nuclear disarmament.

In addition to issues like New START, ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and strengthening the regime of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the issue of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe has been in the forefront of the churches' efforts to promote progress. Since 2009, the councils that represent churches in all the member countries of NATO have jointly addressed NATO and related political leaders three times on this issue. The World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. and the Canadian Council of Churches are the councils involved. We requested the withdrawal of all remaining U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe and the elimination of NATO's 'nuclear sharing' arrangements with five non-nuclear-weapon states in NATO.

These three letters about NATO policy resulted in several meetings in Brussels with high-level NATO officials. The third letter (11 March 2011) was also addressed to you, Mr President, because at the end of the letter we urged the Russian Federation to take steps of its own. A copy is enclosed.

We raise the issue convinced of the necessity of Russian and U.S. leadership in demonstrating steady progress toward a world without nuclear weapons. Our observations about tactical nuclear weapons are made in light of the goal agreed by you and President Obama.

With this letter we are sending a discussion paper on Russian tactical nuclear weapons. It explores the issues outlined here. We would request that the paper might be considered as a basis for dialogue with officials of the Russian Federation by representatives of our councils.

This letter comes to you on behalf of the four councils of churches. It is sent with the hope that the remedies proposed may bring progress in building peace and in protecting lives which are currently at risk.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse-Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement by WCC general secretary, urging the NATO summit in Chicago 20-21 May to "lead by example" and withdraw NATO nuclear weapons still deployed in Europe, 15 May 2012**

The NATO summit in Chicago on 20-21 May 2012 is likely to do precisely what many independent voices in civil society have warned against – postpone important actions and make its progress dependent on Russian actions.

As churches who seek peace, we regret that this armed alliance of democracies will not be taking a widely supported and long-overdue decision in Chicago, namely, to stop sharing U.S. nuclear weapons with five non-nuclear-weapon states in Europe and remove the

approximately 200 U.S. nuclear bombs still based in Europe over two decades after the end of the Cold War.

In the three years leading up to the summit, the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the Canadian Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches of Christ of the U.S.A. sent letters to NATO leaders and met with senior NATO staff. We urged the alliance to send its shared nuclear weapons back to their U.S. owners, freeing increasingly reluctant European allies from keeping and being ready to use a weapon that must never be used.

But that important action apparently still lies ahead. In Chicago, NATO is set to postpone this and other important decisions.

Rather than taking action, advance reports indicate that the summit will make the removal of NATO's nuclear arms from Europe and other confidence-building measures dependent on Russian reciprocity. Our letters warned that the expectation of such reciprocity is a recipe for deadlock. We also urged the Russian Federation to reduce, relocate and eventually eliminate its own tactical nuclear weapons without making NATO's withdrawals a pre-condition.

NATO bears significant responsibilities for international peace and security and should lead by example. In 2010 all NATO states agreed to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security strategies. If the Chicago summit fails to live up to this promise, NATO must take up the issue again immediately afterwards.

We would also ask NATO to make public its new Defense and Deterrence Posture Review, to recognize international and civil society concerns about NATO policies, and to indicate a willingness to engage in greater public discussion of the same.

Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Letter from the WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Nahas Angula, prime minister of the Republic of Namibia, congratulating the government on its recent ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 8 June 2012**

Dear Prime Minister,

This is a letter concerning Namibia's new status under the Treaty of Pelindaba. We are writing to congratulate the government of Namibia on its recent ratification of said treaty. The step, along with your ratification of the IAEA Additional Protocol, has national and international importance. It not only improves nuclear safety and security in Namibia, it also strengthens the protection of all Africa's states against any possession, manufacturing or basing of nuclear weapons on the continent.

We recall with appreciation your visit to the Ecumenical Centre here in April 2009, where you discussed this matter with my predecessor, and the visit of our delegation to Namibia in 2008, whose meetings on the same concern included the foreign minister and speaker of

parliament. It may be of interest to you that we are urging leaders in other regions – especially the Middle East and Northeast Asia – to pursuing the goal of nuclear-weapon-free zone which Africa has achieved.

We recall your affirmation here that your government wanted to use the God-given resource of uranium for only peaceful purposes. As people of faith, we join Namibians of all faiths and of goodwill in valuing that commitment. May its implementation serve to promote a peaceful future for all Namibians and for Africa.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

cc: Rev. Maria Kapere, general secretary, Council of Churches in Namibia
Bishop Zephania Kameeta, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia

- **Public comment by WCC general secretary on the 68th anniversary of atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 5 August 2013**

A lifetime after their tragedy, the finest tribute to the destroyed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still lies ahead. It is that we achieve the survivors' hope for all humanity: "No more Hiroshimas. No more Nagasakis." The God of life calls all of us to take up their tireless cry and make certain that a Hiroshima or Nagasaki bombing can never happen again. This year's anniversary needs renewed commitment from the entire world.

Current events in Northeast Asia dramatize how much the region and the world still live in the shadow of Hiroshima-style mass destruction. Churches from 140 countries will gather soon in South Korea for the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches under the theme "God of life, lead us to justice and peace". Nagasaki and Hiroshima lie just across a strait from Busan, our meeting place. Our hosts will explain the legacy of annihilation including the fate of more than 40,000 Koreans in the two Japanese cities when the atomic bombs were dropped in August 1945.

That legacy today has two old Cold War rivals – North Korea and the U.S.A. – still brandishing nuclear weapons, missiles and bombers over the Korean peninsula. The dangerous recent displays demonstrate the failure on both sides to learn from Hiroshima and from war itself.
The legacy includes the recent anniversary of the Korean War. Sixty years after a ceasefire, none of the antagonists have a peace treaty. But every country in Northeast Asia has its own nuclear arms or accepts protection from U.S. nuclear weapons. As Buddhist, Christian and civil society organizations in the region have long advocated, the Korean Peninsula must be freed of nuclear weapons as a cornerstone for any durable peace.

Instead, the region is being subjected to new increases in the already massive U.S. military deployments in East Asia and the Pacific. U.S. arms sales to China's neighbours, and a military build-up in China, are fuelling global arms production. In the region old disputes over tiny islands are sharpening.

On this year's atom bomb anniversary a central pillar of peace in East Asia is in danger. Japan's new government appears eager to weaken or drop the peace clause in the national constitution. This historic post-1945 commitment forbids Japan to wage war and limits its military forces. The clause is widely appreciated by peace loving people in Japan and its neighbours. Christians and Buddhists in North East Asia insist that it not be changed.

Despite the region's shaky nuclear instability, Japanese government officials are also airing speculation that Japan could consider developing nuclear weapons for itself. It is hard to imagine a more pointed dismissal of the lessons of 1945.

There is also fresh proof of the dangers of nuclear radiation to colour the atom-bomb observances this year. As churches and others work to help the survivors of the Fukushima disaster, the Japanese government has confirmed that massive quantities of radioactive water are seeping into the ocean from the stricken plants each day. Radiation in the area will keep tens of thousands of former residents from ever returning to their homes.

Thankfully, with this anniversary, honest assessments of the grave humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are finally bringing new hope in many countries. Some 80 governments recently issued a joint call to all governments that no nuclear weapon should ever be used again under any circumstances. States that have nuclear weapons, and their allies, are finally being called to greater account.

In an era of increasing global consciousness the abiding lesson of August 1945 is one we can recognize. God's gift of life is precious beyond measure. We must protect life for the good of all people. Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never happen again.

Women

- **Statement by the WCC made at the 2010 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) high-level segment in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women, 30 April 2010**

1. The Commission of the Churches in International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA-WCC) welcomes the 2010 ECOSOC high-level segment and its Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) focus on "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women".

2. The WCC, a fellowship of 348 churches with over 560 million Christians in more than 110 countries, affirm that all persons, both male and female, are created in God's image. God's world was meant to be one of abundance with fundamental human rights and dignity for all; women, however, are disproportionately robbed of this abundance. We, therefore, affirm the promotion of gender equality and justice from a theological and human rights perspective.

3. We maintain that the contributions and empowerment of women and girls of all ages are fundamental, enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) and international laws, and necessary to meet all the Millennium Development Goals.

4. Despite national policies and international agreement to advance women's rights, existing national, international and UN resources and mechanisms are inadequate for eradicating and addressing deprivations of human dignity faced by women. Many efforts have failed to recognize the full diversity of women's situations and conditions and the particular ways different women are disadvantaged.

5. The recent 54th session on the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) on the 15th anniversary of the UN Beijing Platform for Action was a missed opportunity for member states to make concrete commitments with timelines to achieve each of the Platform goals.

6. Three critical areas urgently need greater resources and actions by member states that challenge and transform systemic barriers if women's empowerment and gender equality is to be achieved:

a. Ending the culture and practice of impunity as it relates to violence against women
b. Enacting gender-based reform in leadership, power and decision-making processes
c. Establishing economic justice as many women have disproportionally been affected by the global economic and financial crisis.

7. The CCIA-WCC calls upon member states and the United Nations to:

A. Fulfill the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW

a. *Commit to and provide resources for* an accountability framework for the Beijing Platform for Action that includes concrete benchmarks, timelines, monitoring, evaluations, and adequate resources.

b. *Integrate the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and gender analysis* into all the functional commission of the Economic and Social Council and all future global negotiations.

B. End the culture and practice of impunity: violence against women

a. *End cultural practices and close legal loopholes that grant perpetrators of violence, including states, impunity*. Key to achieving this would be to (a) train and reform police, military, legal and judicial sectors that are often complicit in impunity; (b) include women in the training of the aforementioned sectors; and (c) enact and support sustainable programs for men and boys to take responsibility for ending impunity and violence against women through positive masculinities training, gender awareness and human rights education.

b. *Conduct national and international audits* on the culture and practice of impunity regarding violence against women, especially in situations of war and conflict, racial and ethnic conflict, and extrajudicial killings; and towards migrant workers, Indigenous Peoples, trafficked women and women in poverty.

c. *Enact and implement victim-centered national laws and international mechanisms* to eradicate violence against women and girls and to provide support and protection for victims of such violence. Perpetrators should be held accountable for their behavior, face the consequences of appropriate legal charges and receive professional and spiritual help in moving towards transformation.

d. *Ensure women's participation in peace-building and peace-keeping initiatives and fulfill international commitments* and requirements to end sexual violence against women, particularly in conflict areas, as emphasized by Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889.

C. Transform leadership: gender, power and decision-making

a. *Enact gender-based reform in leadership, institutions and decision-making processes* a) through gender-equity quotas and b) by reforming structures, policies and activities to reflect experiences, priorities, leadership styles and ways of working of both women and men.

b. *Eliminate legal barriers and create laws that ensure women's rights as decision-makers* within their communities and regarding their own lives and bodies as enshrined in the International Bill of Rights, CEDAW and the Beijing Platform.

c. *Incorporate women, in all their economic, social and racial diversity, in all levels of decision-making* to end violence against women, build peace, confront the economic crisis and achieve MDG Targets by 2015.

d. *Ensure women's voices are heard at the UN*by setting an agenda to advance gender justice in consultation with civil society and NGOs, particularly those from the Global South.

D. Establish economic justice: women and the economic and financial crisis

a. *Enact global financial and economic measures that address income disparities and inequality in wealth generation and distribution* and that respond to unjust economic structures that disadvantage women in disproportionate ways.

b. *Implement policies that protect the human rights of women and girls in response to the current global financial and economic crisis,* particularly migrant workers, forced laborers, factory workers, and trafficked persons, including through effective legal and social protection mechanisms.

c. *Strengthen gender-sensitive global financial regulatory frameworks and encourage fair trade* by ensuring the accountability of international institutions, governments and corporations to adhere to human rights, labor standards and environmental agreements

d. *Ensure women's full participation in the economic sector*by removing legal, educational, employment, ownership and social service barriers, and enabling women's decision-making in micro- and macro-economic policies.

e. *Recognize unremunerated labor as work* and include it in calculations of GDP, quality of life, international economic indices, and pension and social security systems.

f. *Utilize independent reviewers, in particular grassroots women's organizations,* to assess progress on women and the economy as member states agreed to in the 23rd UN General Assembly special session on "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century" and the CSW's 52nd session on "Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women" and 53rd session on "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS."

- ## Statement from the international encounter between Orthodox women and Christians from other traditions, Tirana, Albania, 8-12 July 2010

Theological conversations with Orthodox women
Orthodox women facing the challenges andambivalences of the post-modern societies: looking for a theology of healing

1. Praise to God! Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the special blessing to meet, discuss and respond as Orthodox women and men, and sisters and brothers from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant and Pentecostal churches on the critical issue of wounded-ness and healing. This encounter inspired and sponsored by the World Council of Churches, *Women in Church and Society* brought together twenty three participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East, North and South America.

2. We, the participants express our deep gratitude to His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durres and all Albania for generously hosting the meeting in Albania at St. Vlash Theological Academy and for his inspirational words on the wounded-ness and the holistic healing in reviving the faith and hope of the members of the Autocephalous

Orthodox Church of Albania. This shared experience and life of the Orthodox Church of Albania in the last nineteen years offered an essential context for other deep reflections during the gathering.

3. Our conversation on *Orthodox women facing the challenges and ambivalences of thepost-modern societies: looking for a theology of healing* was a follow-up of previousconsultations with Orthodox women on the role of women in the Church (Agapia 1976; Rhodes 1988; Crete 1990; Damascus 1996; Istanbul 1997; Volos 2008). However, our gathering was enriched not only by the presence of Orthodox men but also of other men and women from Christian traditions exploring the healing offered as a common gift of the Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected Saviour who redeems the corrupt and mortal human nature. This healing is expressed in a concrete way daily according to the needs of the social context in which the Christian communities struggle.

4. In this new era of human history, we face new opportunities, but also immensechallenges that can either unite us more closely as a human family or create walls, divisions and wounds which separate us from God and each other and alienate us from those in need.

5. In this context, we reaffirm and commit ourselves to be agents of the Resurrected Lord and instruments of healing in a broken and needy world. Healing is a gift from the Incarnate, Crucified and Risen Lord to all creation. The wounds of women are due to human arrogance and weakness to overcome the social and institutional structures which negatively affect their relationships and diminish their God given dignity.

6. In this perspective the leadership of the women in the life of the church (e.g., worship, administration, catechism, philanthropy and social care) is not understood as seeking power and prestige but as a deeper commitment to love and service that responds to the sacrificing love of Christ. This offering of women can be addressed as a healing to all suffering people, particularly the abused, the violated, the victims of poverty and other marginalized people among which women and children are the most vulnerable and highest numbers.

7. For example, the painful way of the undocumented migrants from Mexico crossing the hot desert of Arizona; the struggle and nightmare of the Palestinians to survive and keep their dignity and land; the oppression experienced by the aboriginal women in Taiwan; the challenges faced by all Christians in Malaysia. These are some of the open wounds in need of healing.

8. When we gather as a community in the Liturgy, we have the possibility of receiving what the early Church called “medicine for life.” The Christian communities are called to continue this liturgy, giving witness to the unity of men and women in common action for healing, promoting justice, peace, mutual understanding, and tolerance and above all love according to the needs of the wounded people in each context.

9. The answer to this call presupposes *metanoia*/repentance which means a complete turnabout of the whole person from patterns of egotism, indifference and injustice to concrete actions of compassion, solidarity and justice.

The way forward
We invite the WCC to encourage meetings that bring together Orthodox women and men with Christians from other traditions so that

- We may learn from diverse theological traditions
- We may interact with different cultural and social contexts and the social sciences
- We may deepen our understanding of today's global world (late modern or post-modern) and contribute towards building a conscientious community of women and men
- We may strengthen our common witness of Christ our Healer to the wounded humanity and nature.
- We may speak out against violence to women as a part of the process forward and better prepare for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation scheduled in Jamaica (2011), and beyond to the 10th WCC Assembly in Korea (2013).

• Oral statement delivered by the CCIA at the UN 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, supporting women's initiatives against violence, New York, U.S.A., 25 March 2013

The World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of churches with a total membership of 580 million, wrote in March 1992 to the Secretary General of the United Nations: "In various international fora, women are urging the United Nations to recognize that violence against women constitutes the violation of the basic human rights of half the world's population. As Christians we support these initiatives, guided by the firm conviction that all human beings are made in the image of God and deserve protection and care."

In a statement prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the World Council of Churches said:
It has been painful for us to acknowledge that institutions which should stand in solidarity with women, including governments and the churches, have not often responded with resolute action. We encounter, through our contact with women at the periphery of all our societies, the struggle for dignity and livelihood that women engage in every day. We believe that empowerment is not possible as long as women live in contexts of violence, often exacerbated by cultural and religious tradition.

It was also said:
We draw the attention to the liberating power of religions and we affirm the positive and supportive role that the churches and other religious institutions can play in standing in solidarity with those women who have to make ethical choices and decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive rights. But of equal concern to the World Council of Churches is the increasing religious extremism in all faiths and the deleterious consequences this has on women's legal, political and social rights.

These statements were made two decades ago, but they are still valid and highly relevant in relation to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women today. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to reiterate that women's rights are human rights, and that human rights are universal. Traditional values or religious beliefs cannot justify the acceptance of violence against women, nor can they be accepted as limitations on women's rights and freedom.

Women as well as men are created in the image of God and deserve to be respected, protected, and cared for. It is necessary for member states to agree upon and protect strong international frameworks. Civil society, including the faith-based community, has an important role to challenge attitudes and traditions that contribute to undermining women's rights and dignity.

We the peoples of the United Nations, have a shared responsibility to protect, defend, and expand women's rights and freedom.

REGIONAL CONCERNS

Africa

- **Declaration of commitment to human rights, statement signed by church leaders from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, 17 April 2010**

We, the heads of the churches of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo listed below, took part in the workshop on human rights at the Bishop Shaumba Centre in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, organized from 13-17 April 2010 by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Bread for the World (BFW) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), thanks to the financial support of the European Union (EU),

- Believe that human beings are created in the image of God;
- Recognizing the prophetic and messianic mission of the church;
- Mindful of the extremely important and dangerous nature of the work of human rights NGOs;
- In the firm belief that human rights are prerogatives without which human dignity is merely an empty wish;
- Aware that ignorance of human rights violations is a primary reason for the conflicts which have devastated the world and the sub-region of the Great-Lakes in particular;
- Given the worrying paradox of the rich natural resources of the DRC and the desperate poverty of its population;
- Mindful of the church's role to both be alert and to be an advocate;
- Given the many challenges such as HIV/AIDS, climate change, massive violations of human rights …
- Given the importance of the interaction between the churches and human rights NGOs;
- And mindful of God's word which says "Righteousness exalts a nation" (Proverbs 14:34).

Following our exchange and consultation, we make the following statement of commitment:

1. We make the firm commitment to work together for the promotion of human dignity and fundamental human rights;

2. We have decided to accompany our respective states in the struggle against corruption, impunity and poverty;

3. We reiterate our commitment to support the legitimate struggle of our countries against climate change;

4. We call on our populations to change the way they think and their harmful behaviour towards the ecosystem;

5. We wish to express our thanks to the WCC, BFW, the LWF and the EU for their initiative and their material, moral, financial and spiritual support of this workshop.

6. Request that the WCC, BFW, LWF and the EU continue to support us to build the capacity of our human rights leaders and of the education of our populations in the areas of human rights, environmental protection, HIV/AIDS prevention, advocacy and lobbying;

7. Commit ourselves to work together with human rights NGOs so that the contents of this statement are not just empty words.

8. Ask for the creation of a framework for consultation and for action supported by the WCC, Bread for the World, the LWF and the EU, that this be put in place and work effectively.

1. Mgr. Marini Bodho, national president, Church of Christ in Congo (CCCo);
2. Mgr. Yemba Kekumba, bishop of the United Methodist Church, DRC, and president of the coordination committee of the DRC member churches of the World Council of Churches/All Africa Conference of Churches (WCC/AACC);
3. Mgr. Mbaya Tshiakany, regional president, CCCo, Kasai-Oriental Province;
4. Bishop KabambaMukala, president, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo (ELCCo);
5. Mgr. Molanga, Auxiliary Bishop, Anglican Church in Congo;
6. Bishop Bwamangela Kamili, ELCCo, Kivu;
7. Bishop Mwamba Sumaili, ELCCo, Kalemie;
8. Rev. Tshimungu Mayela, legal representative, Presbyterian Community of Kinshasa;
9. M. Muhiya Sangwa, CEJ/National Episcopal Conference (Catholic Church), Kinshasa;
10. Rev. Nyakufa Bagota, CCCo/JPSC, Ituri Province;
11. Rev. Lilenge Nkalanga, CCCo/JPSC, Equator Province;
12. Rev. Kinyamba Lunge, Focal Point, Ecumenical Forum AACC/Kinshasa;
13. Rev. Boyanga Makikote, CCCo/JPSL, Oriental Province;
14. Rev. Muanda Mikiama, CCCo/JPSC, Kongo Central;
15. Rev. Mbumba Kilombo, ELCCo, Boma;
16. Rev. Clement Ninziza, Anglican Church in Burundi;
17. Rev. Tite Ningejefe, Free Methodist Church in Burundi.

- **International consultation organized by the WCC/CCIA and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) on "Peace and security in Africa: ecumenical responses", Kigali, Rwanda, 28 January – 1 February 2012**

A World Council of Churches (WCC) consultation in Kigali discussed peace and security issues in Africa, with more than ninety church and ecumenical leaders. Together, they also reflected on Rwandan experiences of ethnic violence, genocide and church initiatives of reconciliation.

The consultation was organized by the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) and the All Africa Conference of Churches(AACC). It took place from 28 January to 1 February in Kigali, Rwanda, addressing the theme, "Peace and security in Africa: ecumenical responses".

The consultation started with a visit to Kigali Genocide Memorial by the participants, while the opening session was held at the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda.

At the event ecumenical leaders discussed a range of issues affecting the peace and security situation in Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast and Democratic Republic of Congo.

These issues included human rights violations, ethnic and religious conflicts, rule of law and democratic governance, freedom of religion, proliferation of arms, militarization and gender-based violence.

“The experiences of African people who are forced to live in vulnerable situations compel the ecumenical movement to offer ways in which people of Africa can celebrate and feel that they can live at peace with security and human dignity”, said Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa, president of the AACC.

The presenters also offered ecumenical responses to the exploitation of natural resources in Africa and the dynamics of economic and political powers.

In his presentation on ‘Peace, security and human rights in the emerging geo-political context’, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the CCIA said, “The emerging geo-political changes and the new global order warrant an alternative model of security agenda. This security model should affirm the cardinal principle of ‘human security’ that will ensure human rights and human dignity.”

Upholding the dignity of all Africans

Patrick Mazimhaka, former deputy chairman of the Africa Union, in his presentation stated that “civil wars in Africa were a response to a failed decolonization process. This process handed over artificially crafted countries in a modern setting with its complex geopolitics to a leadership, which had never been exposed to state craft.

“Peace and security at all levels in African continent is the need of the hour to uphold the dignity of all Africans,” he added.

“The Kigali consultation has provide opportunities for African church and ecumenical leaders to review the critical situations of conflicts, violence and people’s right to life and dignity in today’s Africa,” said Dr Nigussu Legesse, the WCC programme executive for Africa.

“The consultation also reflected on varied experiences of peace-building in the African context, especially from a Christian and theological perspective. The discussions have helped to evolve strategies for ecumenical advocacy on peace-building and reconciliation efforts in Africa,” he added.

Over the past years, the CCIA has accompanied churches in Africa in addressing peace, security and human rights concerns, especially in a number of conflict situations.

The event is the second in a series of consultations organized by CCIA since last year. The last consultation was focused on Asia, and the next one will be held in Latin America.

- **Joint statement by the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches, on the escalating armed conflict between Sudan and South Sudan, 18 April 2012**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) express grave concern over the escalating armed conflict between Sudan and South Sudan and call upon both parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid any further deterioration of the situation.

We call for mutual respect of the territorial integrity of each other's state. We have followed with deep concern the developments that led to the occupation of Heglig by the armed forces of the Republic of South Sudan and advocate for a just and peaceful resolution of the conflict starting with immediate ceasefire.

The WCC and the AACC deplore loss of life caused by the escalation of the conflict. We call on both parties to resist from hardening of positions and instead agree to resolve any differences through talks as they did in the run up to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). We implore the parties to use the CPA as the framework and model for resolving the border issue and all other outstanding issues. In this regard we call upon the Government of Kenya, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU) and International Community to double their diplomatic efforts at helping Sudan and South Sudan to de-escalate the military campaigns and sit around the table to negotiate.

We wish to emphasize that war should not continue to be considered as a viable option. And any full-blown war between Sudan and South Sudan will have security implications for the whole region and precipitate a humanitarian disaster. Therefore it must be avoided at all costs.

The WCC and the AACC wish to assure the Sudanese churches and people of our prayerful support and solidarity in seeking a peaceful solution to the prevailing conflict. We are prepared at any and all times to be at the disposal of the Sudan Council of Churches and its member churches and work together to save lives and promote peace, healing and reconciliation in South Sudan and Sudan.

For: World Council of Churches
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

For: All Africa Conference of Churches
Rev. Dr André Karamaga
AACC general secretary

- **Statement by WCC deputy general secretary following armed attacks on Christian churches during church services in Kano and Maiduguri, Nigeria, and in Nairobi, Kenya, 30 April 2012**

Following armed attacks Sunday on Christian churches in Kano and Maiduguri, Nigeria, and in Nairobi, Kenya, leaders of the World Council of Churches (WCC) have called for people of faith to support afflicted believers through prayer and solidarity.

"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and God's ears are open to their cry," said Georges Lemopoulos, deputy general secretary of the council, pledging spiritual and practical

support to the afflicted. Quoting from Psalm 34, he continued, “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”

The leadership of the WCC is in close contact with member churches in Nigeria, Kenya and other nations and regions, including South Asia and the Middle East, where religious communities have come under fire in recent times.

According to news agency reports, at least four people in Maiduguri and fifteen in Kano were killed, and many more injured, in a series of bombings during Sunday morning worship services. A church service in Nairobi was the target of a similar grenade attack; late in the day, one person was said to have been killed there and 16 others were wounded, five of them critically.

Côte d’Ivoire

- **Statement by WCC general secretary expressing concern regarding the on-going violence in Côte d’Ivoire, 5 April 2011**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) expresses deep concern regarding the on-going violence and killings of a large number of civilians in Cote d’Ivoire, including women and children, particularly in Duekoue and Abidjan.

It is with great distress that we have been following the brutal killings of innocent people in the country as well as the mass exodus of civilians who are affected by the rivalry between the two political parties under the respective rival leaderships.

The escalation of violence in Abidjan and the surrounding towns over the weekend is a cause for profound regret. We are concerned by the worsening situation, as it can lead to deep ethnic and religious conflicts, and as a result Ivoirians may lose their sense of belonging and the spirit of communal harmony which inspires them to live in peace. When negotiations could lead to conflict resolution, it is unfortunate that the followers of the two major political factions have opted for violence to settle their disputes at the expense of the lives of citizens.

We fear that the deteriorating situation is on the verge of enflaming religious conflicts. Already, religion is being used to wield political and economic power. We appeal to all people of goodwill to reject such manipulation. It is in this context that the World Council of Churches urges leaders on both sides to take adequate measures to end the hostilities and work for a negotiated political settlement to attain justice, peace and reconciliation within the country.

We request that immediate action be taken to ensure the protection and security of every individual in Cote d’Ivoire. It is our sincere hope that those in positions of leadership and authority will take immediate actions to ensure security and peace with justice, to settle the political conflict and to launch a transitional government of national unity for the sake of all Ivoirians.

As members of churches who are committed to a Just Peace throughout God's creation, we pray that a right order and the spirit of reconciliation will prevail among all people and communities in Cote d'Ivoire.

- **Final communiqué from the ecumenical solidarity visit to Ivory Coast, 28 November-4 December 2011**

From 28 November to 4 December 2011 an ecumenical delegation visited the Ivory Coast to meet with the churches and representatives of civil society in the country on the initiative of four international church organizations:

- The World Council of Churches (WCC), represented by Rev. Simon Dossou, African WCC president, Dr Nigussu Legesse, of the Africa desk of the WCC in Geneva, Father François Tounkara, of Conakry, Guinea, and Mme Jeannette Aneyé, central committee member,
- The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), represented by Rev. Richard Murigandé, from Rwanda,
- CEVAA (Community of Churches in Mission), represented by Rev. Étienne Roulet, from Switzerland, and
- The Protestant Federation of France, represented by Rev. Daniel Thévenet, from France.

The delegation had successive meetings with leaders of the United Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast, the Evangelical Federation of the Ivory Coast, the Head of the Ministry of the Interior, the National Human Rights Commission, the Governor of the District of Abidjan, the leaders of the Work and Missions of the Baptist Churches, the Catholic Archbishop of Abidjan, and the Truth and Reconciliation Dialogue Commission.

The following message was given to all those whom we met:

1. The ecumenical community has closely followed the crisis which has shaken the Ivory Coast and has not ceased to pray for the country.

2. We have come on a visit to show solidarity with all those who have suffered, to whatever side they belong.

3. We have come to see, listen and understand our Brothers and Sisters in the faith, as well as the main leaders in public and political life.

4. We have come to offer support in the seeking of solutions that will allow the Ivory Coast to arrive at reconciliation and rebuild the nation.

We have heard from those whom we met some strong statements that can be summarized as follows:

1. The Ivory Coast has always been a hospitable country, welcoming many from neighbouring countries. What happens in the Ivory Coast has repercussions throughout the sub-region.

2. The problem leading to the outbreaks of violence is neither ethnic nor religious in origin, but originates at political and economic levels.

3. The traditional values of engaging in dialogue to reach understanding have been eroded despite the peaceful tradition of the Ivory Coast.

4. Many people, on all sides, have suffered violence, but the people of the Ivory Coast are highly resilient. None the less, there is a real need for truth, forgiveness, and reconciliation, in order to mend the damaged social fabric.

5. Some political movements have made use of the Christian churches and have attempted to manipulate them in order to add a religious dimension to the conflict.

6. The Christian churches have thus been confused with some extremist religious movements and have become victims because of that identification.

7. The strength of the churches (Protestant, Evangelical and Catholic) lies in their ability to enrich one another out of their diversity, and to use it to serve the cause of unity.

We thus recommend:

1. That politicians acknowledge to one another, in a spirit of humility and truth, the wrongs and errors they have committed, and ask for forgiveness in order to take forward the process of national reconciliation.

2. That, to that end, they have recourse to the traditional values of Ivory Coast wisdom of engaging in dialogue and listening to one another.

3. That political authorities do not ignore the historical and instituted churches, but have confidence in their ability, through their extended country-wide networks, to participate in reconciliation and rebuilding national life; and that extremist religious movements be better identified and monitored.

4. That the churches do not allow themselves to be manipulated by political movements, but play to the full their role in proclaiming the Word of God in a totally independent way.

5. That, to that end, the churches do not cast themselves in the role of victims, but should participate in a resolute and politically unbiased way in public life.

6. That the churches should come together in a credible and responsible organization in order to speak with a united voice, in cooperation with other religious traditions.

As they end their mission, the members of the ecumenical delegation wish to thank all whom they have met for their attentive listening and their openness, and, in particular, the United Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast for welcoming and kindly accompanying the delegation.

Abidjan, 3 December 2011. On behalf of the delegation
Rev. Simon Kossi Dossou
Spokesperson

Translated from the French, Language Service, World Council of Churches

Democratic Republic of Congo

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Joseph Kabila, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo on the suspicious death of Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, 4 June 2010**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches would like to express its deep concern at the death under suspicious circumstances of Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, a leading human rights advocate and executive director of the Congolese NGO, La Voix des Sans-Voix pour les Droits de l'Homme, in DRC.

It was reported that Mr Chebeya Bahizire was called to meet a senior police official in Kinshasa late in the afternoon of 1 June 2010. He had a brief telephone contact with his wife during the evening. However, early next morning his body was found on the outskirts of Kinshasa. His driver is still missing.

Mr Chebeya Bahizire was known to us personally and he was part of WCC's human rights defenders network in Africa. We had the privilege of the participation of his Organization at the human rights workshop that was organized by the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and Bread for the World, Germany in Kinshasa in April this year.

Your Excellency, we are concerned of the fact that the past year has seen increased oppression against Congolese human rights defenders. In this context, we urge the Congolese government to act as agents of the rule of law. The government has a responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of its citizens and should demonstrate this respect by conducting a full, open and transparent investigation into the death of Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and the fate of his driver, Mr Fidele Bazana Edadi.

We ask urgently that the government ensures these practices are stopped and those responsible are brought to justice, including whoever is responsible for the death of Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire.

Sincerely yours,
Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Minute on the situation in Democratic Republic of Congo, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been facing a series of crises and armed conflicts in recent decades. The country has been passing through a situation of fragile peace, lack of security, poverty and underdevelopment. With regard to security and humanitarian issues, the situation in the eastern part of the country remains a matter of serious concern, despite the 23 March 2009 peace agreement between the armed groups and the government. As a result, innocent people are constantly under attack. Killings, assassinations, widespread rape, looting, destruction of houses and setting villages on fire are common occurrences. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicates that more than 2,600,000 people have been displaced due to the armed conflict in North Kivu Province which has been going on since April 2012 between the government troops and M23 rebels. We welcome the recent initiative of the M23 rebels to give up their arms in order to facilitate the peace process in the DRC.

Although the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement gave the presidency of the republic an opportunity to organize the administration of the country properly, the real problem remains the continuing lack of a national consensus. With the support of the international community, the first democratic elections were organized in December 2006; these were intended to provide the country with legally-established institutions. The presidential and legislative elections were held in November 2011 amidst political chaos and uncertainties. Subsequently, the political situation became highly polarized and all state institutions in the country were weakened. The country is facing a legitimacy crisis today as a result of absence of transparency in the electoral process of 2011. This situation came about due to a dearth of preparation in terms of civic and electoral education among the voters.

The member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Church of Christ in Congo (CCC) organized a consultation on 15-16 August 2013, reflecting on current challenges facing the people of the DRC. As the political stability and security in the country continue to be in peril, it was decided that churches in the DRC should initiate a process of peace-building in the country with the assistance of the WCC. They believe that in order to prepare the Congolese people properly for the coming elections, churches in the DRC should take a leading role in preparing the people to understand the electoral process and democratic governance. This needs to be done prior to the local elections scheduled for 2014 and the general elections to be held in 2016.

The Congolese churches have requested that the WCC general secretary initiate an ecumenical process of peace-building in the DRC. In order to facilitate a peace process in the DRC, the Congolese churches have requested the support of the WCC and suggested that the WCC should play an important role similar to the one it has played in the past, in similar contexts in Africa.

Considering the urgent need of peace-building in the conflict-affected DRC, the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

A. ***Acknowledges*** and stands in solidarity with all the victims of this protracted conflict;

B. ***Requests*** that the general secretary explore possibilities to initiate a programme to support the peace-building initiatives of the Congolese churches through dialogue and mediation;

C. ***Encourages*** the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs to organize continued consultations to evolve a strategic framework for global advocacy on peace and reconciliation in the DRC, in collaboration with member churches, regional and sub-regional organizations, church related and civil society groups;

D. ***Supports*** churches in the DRC in their efforts for civic education on electoral processes and democratic governance;

E. ***Urges*** the WCC to be an accompanying presence during the forthcoming elections in 2014 and 2016 through monitoring and observation; and

F. ***Calls*** on WCC member churches to keep the people of the DRC in their prayers, and to pray for an end to the conflict and lasting peace in the country.

God of Life,

We pray for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
Be with them in their struggle.
Bring an end to the conflict.
God of Life, Lead us all to Justice and Peace. Amen.

Horn of Africa

- **Statement by WCC general secretary calling for urgent action in the Horn of Africa, 18 August 2011**

In comments to staff of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on 18 August, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit expressed alarm at the "blocking and hindering of the food supply in famine-struck Somalia, with the effect that more and more people are dying. This interference with humanitarian aid is inhumane and must be strongly condemned."

The WCC general secretary went on to say, "Recent reports indicate that 400,000 children are at risk of death if action is not taken now. People of all ages are dying, hour by hour. Governments must find workable solutions to the political circumstances that hinder the delivery of water, food and other supplies."

He continued, "The famine is a human tragedy that should be addressed immediately, regardless of political struggles in a given nation. The international community, including African churches and all church-related relief agencies, must move swiftly to make assistance available. Innocent lives are at stake."

Tveit voiced WCC support for its partners in Somalia and throughout the Horn of Africa, particularly the ACT Alliance, an alliance of 111 churches and agencies working in humanitarian assistance, advocacy and development.

He concluded, "The World Council of Churches calls upon churches, specialized ministries and generous individuals to lend financial support to the work of the ACT Alliance and its member organizations. At this crucial time, it is essential that we remember to keep all the people of the Horn of Africa in our prayers."

Kenya

- **Tribute by the WCC general secretary to the late Professor Dr Wangari Maathai of Kenya, 7 October 2011**

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for God has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.
Psalm 24:1-2 NRSV

Dear Family and Loved Ones of Professor Dr Wangari Muta Maathai, Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

I write to you on behalf of the World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of 349 churches in more than 110 countries and territories seeking unity, a common witness and Christian service to offer our heartfelt condolences for the passing of Professor Maathai and our words of admiration and tribute to a life well lived. Professor Maathai's life and witness epitomize the words of the psalmist. We believe that it was out of her deep faith in God, the Creator of all the earth,that she drew strength and creativity to serve as a dedicated and effective advocate for the care of creation and environmental justice.

Dr Maathai's vocation of education, empowerment, and peace with justice was so akin to the work of the World Council of Churches, resulting in a long partner relationship with the programmatic work of the council. Because of her strong faith and advocacy work, Dr Maathai was a WCC invited speaker in 1979 at the WCC Conference on Faith, Science and the Future at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the U.S.A. She has also been an adviser on the WCC's Commission on Church and Society. She did not only challenge local communities and civil society institutions but also challenged Kenyan churches as well as communities of faith elsewhere in the world to care for creation and to work together for environmental justice and those things which make for peace. Her labour and achievements have long been documented and lauded by organizations and governments. She continued to use these recognitions, such as that of Nobel Peace Laureate, as opportunities and platforms to advance her efforts toward the common good, convinced as she was quoted to say, "We cannot tire or give up. We owe it to the present and future generations of all species to rise up and walk!" Her work has indeed had a profound positive effect on the present generation and will certainly continue to inspire generations to come.

Today, here in Geneva at the Ecumenical Centre, the headquarters of the World Council of Churches, Brothers and Sisters will gather in a memorial service to give praise to God for the life and work of Professor Dr Wangari Muta Maathai. Though separated by thousands of miles from her beloved Kenya, we gather in memorial and prayer, feeling a close bond in our common calling and witness and because of our Common Creator. Please know that in your time of great loss, you are held in prayer by Brothers and Sisters around the whole, who pray that you will take comfort in the words of Revelation,

"...Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.' 'Yes', says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them." (Rev 14:13)

Yours in our Common Lord, crucified and resurrected,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter to Kenyan president H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta following the massacre that took place at the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi beginning 21 September 2013, 1 October 2013**

Your Excellency,

It is with profound sadness that we witnessed the terrible tragedy caused by the unwarranted attack against innocent civilians in the Westgate shopping centre one week ago, beginning 21 September. We deplore and condemn such barbaric acts of violence. It is heart-breaking that civilians, mostly women and children, became targets of such violence.

We mourn the lives taken and pray for the quick recovery and healing of those wounded and affected by this tragedy. We praise the courage of all those who risked their lives to come to the rescue of others, and we hope that the Kenyan government will bring the perpetrators of this massacre to justice and ensure security and peace for all Kenyans.

We extend our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and express our sympathy and solidarity to your government, your Excellency, and to all the people of Kenya, especially to those directly affected by this traumatic ordeal.

Our prayers and thoughts are with the people of Kenya in this time of grief and suffering. May the God of Life continue to strengthen you to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14).

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Solidarity message to the WCC member churches in Kenya following the massacre that took place at the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi beginning 21 September 2013, 1 October 2013**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One week ago, you and the people of Kenya experienced a tragic incident, with deplorable and barbaric acts of violence targeted against innocent people at the Westgate mall near Nairobi. It is with profound sadness that we followed the events in the news during the past week and prayed for all who were involved.

Together with you, I and the whole ecumenical family condemn these acts of violence. It is tragic that innocent civilians, particularly women and children, are held hostage by extremist groups and became targets of such violence.

We mourn the lives taken and pray for the healing of those who were wounded. We recognize and acknowledge the courage of those civilians who at great risk saved the lives of many. We are grateful that the Kenyan government was able to bring an end to the standoff and will bring the perpetrators of the massacre to justice and ensure security and peace with justice for all Kenyans.

I take this opportunity to extend our sincere condolences to the families of those who have been killed and express our sympathy to all who are suffering from the after-effects of these traumatic experiences. We shall continue to pray for peace among all citizens of Kenya.

We are reminded of our call to seek justice and righteousness; it is imperative for strengthening our faith. This call demands our concern for all those who are deprived of their inherent and inalienable rights and dignity, of fullness of life and equal justice.

May the God of Life continue to strengthen you to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14).

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Liberia

- **Report on visit to Liberia of ecumenical observers team appointed by the WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in advance of elections scheduled to take place on 11 October 2011, 7 – 12 August 2011**

BACKGROUND
Liberia is one of the many post-conflict countries in Africa which is striving to “rebuild the pieces and rebuild the walls” of its nation. A country of about three and a half million (3.5) people, majority are said to be illiterate up to 85 per cent. As a nation, Liberia recently celebrated its 164th independence. It is in Liberia where the religious communities and civil society worked together for peaceful resolution of the war that ravaged the nation/state, property and people. One of the results of this effort was the establishment of an Inter-faith Council of Liberia. In 2006 a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up and a report submitted to the government. Implementation of the results/recommendations of the TRC has not been forthcoming. After the elections held in 2005, Liberia was the first African country to elect a woman as a president.

Currently the people of Liberia are preparing themselves for elections towards the end of the year, an event that has attracted many but diverse political parties. Political tensions have been mounting and according to the general secretary of the LCC Rev. Dr Benjamin Lartey they are “very worried about the adverse consequences within the context which could foresee war, which Liberians do not want to happen”. The LCC was asked by the government to work with the Independent Human Rights Commission to “commence a process of healing and reconciliation, but the process has up to now failed to commence”. Because of the growing political tensions, the church leaders in Liberia are concerned that without healing and reconciliation, and the involvement of the ecumenical family, the elections could result in violence. It is against this backdrop that the LCC leadership wrote to the General Secretaries of WCC and AACC appealing to them to assist at this critical juncture in the history of Liberia. Objectives of the WCC/AACC mission as stipulated by LCC are:

1. To make a solidarity visit to Liberia and meet with all political leaders, church leaders, women and youth, to bring about Healing and reconciliation;

2. To send ecumenical observers/monitors for elections on October 11, 2011 to bring credibility to the process; and

3. To mobilize financial support from the ecumenical family to the Liberian Council of Churches to effectively participate in the electoral process.

Following the decision by the WCC and AACC to send an ecumenical verification mission to Liberia to ascertain general political, security and social situation of that country, a seven member delegation comprising the under listed individuals arrived in Monrovia the capital of Liberia on 6th and 7th August 2011.

Members of the delegation are:

1. Most Rev. Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah (Leader of Delegation), Methodist Church Ghana, immediate past presding bishop, AACC vice-President for West Africa WCC central committeemember
2. Dr Brigalia Bam, chair of the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa,member of the Panel of the Wise of the African Union, former general secretary of South African Council of Churches
3. Hon. Kenneth Dzirasah, former deputy speaker of Parliament, Ghana chairman of Ghana Refugee Board
4. Rev. Iteffa Gobena, former president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Mekane Yesus, AACC Envoy to the African Union
5. Ambassador Mike Rugema, AACC Great Lakes focal person for Rwanda and former ambassador of Rwanda to the Republic of Germany and Israel
6. Dr Agnes Abuom, AACC ecumenical accompanier, Horn of Africa, member of the central and executive committees of WCC
7. Dr Nigussu Legesse, executive secretary for relations with Africa World Council of Churches

The LCC at its meeting on the 7th briefed the delegation on the situation and made available a line of the programme and activities to cover the five days visit (Annex 2). The mission on its own conducted some verification and identified a number of the issues and came to the conclusion that there is cause to be concerned about Liberia's future political discourse and this must attract the attention of the international community.

THE MAIN OBSERVATIONS

The forthcoming elections are the second post conflict democratic elections. Interaction with a broad-based spectrum of stakeholders comprised of the president, church leaders, women and youth leaders; Muslim and Traditional leaders, Ahmadiya Muslim leadership, political parties leaders including presidential and vice-presidential aspirants, civil society representatives, and the international community has revealed the state of anxiety, state of insecurity, a gloomy picture of the outcome of elections and uneasiness about the process. Civil society activism including that of the church and other faith communities is low.

Failure to implement the TRC report has been a source of great concern to identifiable groups. That is a source of despondency in the political process. To establish these concerns the delegation interviewed a cross section of people as indicated above (see annex 2 timetable).

The following are some of the concerns noted:

(a) Free, fair and transparent elections – The possibility of the elections not being free, fair and transparent was raised by many stakeholders.

(b) Politics of exclusion and marginalization – Politics of exclusion for example, attempts through the referendum to disqualify certain prospective candidates; there is disparity

between rural and urban areas in terms of information flow, illiteracy rates and accessibility.

(c) Eligibility requirements – Stringent eligibility requirements put in place make it difficult for prospective candidates to obtain the relevant documents to enable them file their candidature.

(d) Communication/media – Complaints about fair access for all to state media for fair campaign. There is not much publicity to show that the country is in the mood for election. On account of the language in use in the media the level of political intolerance is rising. The youth complaint about the repeated abuse, manipulation and exploitation by politicians over the years and vowed and prayed not to permit themselves to be taken advantage of.

(e) Security – The speculation that UN will not provide security during the elections has heightened concerns over national security. Particularly significant is the security for women and children who in the past suffered and have been victims of rape. Also worth noting is increased ritual killings in the wake of political campaign for political power. There was concern over the state's inability to uphold the rule of law and to make suspects face justice. If speculation that the UN will not provide security, then the absence of international observers would throw the process out of control. It is therefore imperative to ensure that there are international observers on the ground.

(f) National Election Commission – With regard to the National Election Commission, there is delay of meeting certain constitutional time frame obstructed the NEC from following a realistic timetable.

(g) Forthcoming referendum – During our interaction with stakeholders, the subject of the holding of the referendum came up as the most controversial issue. Not only was there, dissatisfaction about the timing, but there was concern over the fact that whichever way the decision of the referendum went a section of the prospective candidates would be disabled from contesting and that is a big recipe for disaster and instability. Many participants did not mince their words in this regard and the delegation had to take it on board seriously.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall need is for free, credible and transparent electoral process. All key players must demonstrate free, credible and transparent election.

In order to realize this overall objective we recommend:

- Improved fair access to state media

1. Electoral preparations:
   - Public education by the Electoral Commission should be intensified
   - That agencies for voter education, public awareness, training of local observers and other related activities should be enhanced
   - Efforts should be made to expedite the replacement of missing voter ID cards

2. Guidelines and the Code of Conduct for the campaign should be made public – published in state media

- We strongly recommend constructive engagement amongst political parties and the National Electoral Commission in order to promote tolerance and respect for opposing views.
- Planting of seeds of hatred and discord through the media should be discouraged and the use of decorous language should be encouraged in public discourse.
- We call on authorities to investigate the conflicting figures being put in the public domain on the electoral roll/register.

3. Peace and security – As the elections approach, peace and security of all should be ensured particularly for youth and women. Political aspirants should avoid manipulation and misuse of the youth.

4. Electoral requirements – We strongly recommend that to enable candidates to go through the requirements, the Electoral Commission should look into the need for extending the registration time in order not to disentitle potential candidates from registering. We further recommend the decentralization of all agencies responsible for facilitating the registration for example the Ministry of Finance, Justice and Police, etc. In order to allay the anxieties of aspirants generally, we urge the security agencies to interact with them to ensure peaceful campaigns and personal security.

5. Religious institutions – We urge religious institutions, especially the leaders, to be non-partisan. We urge a more effective collaboration amongst LCC, other religious organizations, traditional leaders and civil society to enhance a peaceful and non violent electoral process. We urgently call on the government to provide the necessary framework within which this can take place.

6. Political parties – We encourage various political parties to honour their pledge to refrain from acts that are likely to undermine the political process, the peace and tranquility of the nation. We wish to urge the UN to assist NEC to strengthen the Inter-Party Forum (IPF) to create an appropriate platform to facilitate dialogue and consensus building prior to and after the elections.

7. Concerns about the referendum

The referendum featured prominently among all the stakeholders that the delegation met. Five scenarios were put forward by stakeholders as follows:

i) That the referendum should not be held. They argued that not only was it unconstitutional, it was inherently divisive and not enough education had been conducted and timing was not appropriate as it contradicted the provisions of the Constitution which requires when a decision is taken by the Legislature to hold a referendum it shall be held not sooner than 12 months from the date of the decision [see Article 91(1) of the Constitution]
ii) That the referendum could be held provided the implementation of its results, are carried out by the subsequent government (post election).
iii) That the Legislature should repeal its decision ordering a referendum in order to pave way for the preparation of a memorandum of understanding by all parties concerned, in the spirit of the 2003 Accra Accord on Liberia which enabled the portion of the Constitution on residency requirement to be suspended to accommodate inclusiveness.
iv) Some stakeholders argued for the referendum to go on as planned.

v) There was a general call for a constitutional conference to review the current constitution generally as opposed to piecemeal amendments as envisaged by the referendum.

After careful consideration of the issues raised by the stakeholders, the delegation wishes to respectively recommend scenario 3.

There is the need for NEC in consultation with the political parties to map out a clear direction for a post referendum Liberia, should the referendum be absolutely necessary, taking into consideration the possible reaction from presidential aspirants who will be disabled from contesting as a result of the residential exclusion clause.

8. Guided by the paramount need for peace and smooth transition, the delegation is of the opinion that the referendum is likely to further divide the political front particularly when it is clear that political parties have taken entrenched positions. We are of the view that given the current political temperature, any attempt whether through the referendum or otherwise to exclude any section of the Liberian society from expressing their desires can lead to chaos and reverse the admirable gains made so far. We further recommend that the suggestion by stakeholders we met that at an appropriate date a constitutional Conference be held to review the entire Constitution should be considered.

9. October 2011 elections
We wish to acknowledge that all the stakeholders affirmed that the October 2011 elections should take place as scheduled. We prayerfully hope that the good people of Liberia will choose the path of peace and endeavor to abide by the pledge they made.

10. Enhance NEC capacity – There is the need for support – technical and professional – for the NEC to strengthen its public relations and communications outlook to reverse the unfavorable perception that stakeholders carry about it. We found out that many of the charges raised against the NEC were not entirely justified and that they are the product of NEC's poor communication with the stakeholders. NEC's information technology deficit should be reversed in the long term. We found most crucial the need for technical electoral expertise with much experience to support NEC prior to, during and after the election.

11. WCC/AACC – We strongly recommend that WCC/AACC as a matter of urgency establish contact with the UN, AU and ECOWAS secretary generals to convey to these bodies the seriousness of the situation and call for immediate action from them. Additionally, we request that the WCC/AACC sends a review mission to verify the state of affairs as a follow-up of the present mission.

CONCLUSION
Our overall assessment of the difficulties and anxieties associated with the electoral process is that these difficulties would have been avoided if Parliament had respected timelines that were set for the conduct of election related activities such as the passage of the referendum law, and provisions regulating re-demarcation of the constituency boundaries.

It was clear at the end of our mission that then solution of the Liberian issue requires strong political will from major stakeholders – the NEC, political parties, Parliament, religious organizations, and civil society organizations – to reach a political compromise and that unrestrained threats to resort to court for constitutional resolution of the impasse is in

nobody's interest. (Refer to our recommendation on the referendum where we referred to the Accra Accord).

The WCC and AACC pledges continued accompaniment, prayers and solidarity during this critical period in the history of Liberia.

Libya

- **Resolution on the escalation of violence in Libya adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011**

The central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in Geneva from 16 to 22 February 2011 expresses its deep concern about disturbing reports of the escalation of violence and the killing of hundreds of protestors in clashes with Libyan security forces over the past few days.

The WCC central committee condemns the use of force on all sides of the conflict. We call all parties to respect the human rights of all people in Libya and we urge that ways be found to establish a peaceful dialogue to end the violence, and that efforts be made to ensure a future that brings peace with justice and security for all people.

We pray and hope for the safety of the people of Libya, and for a non-violent and just resolution of this current conflict.

- **Joint statement issued by the WCC, the Conference of European Churches and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, calling for a broader response to the humanitarian crisis in and around Libya, 1 April 2011**

Call for a broader response to the humanitarian crisis in and around Libya
The humanitarian situation in Libya and on its borders remains a serious concern. As attacks and armed conflicts continue in Libya, untold numbers of people are at risk. Increasing numbers of people flee to neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean, including Turkey, Malta and Italy. It is also a matter of concern that refugees, particularly from Somalia and Eritrea, who sought safety in Libya or were there in transit, are also now seeking safe haven.

A word of appreciation is due to various governments and agencies for assistance they extend to the large numbers of foreign migrant workers who have fled from Libya to Egypt and Tunisia, and for the concerted efforts to repatriate them to their countries of origin.

The World Council of Churches, together with the Conference of European Churches and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, stands in solidarity with North African and

European churches and congregations that have opened their doors to people displaced by the crisis.

A wide circle of the international community is demonstrating concern for the crisis and its outcome. We call on them to broaden their response by willingly sharing the responsibility to provide aid and protection to refugees, migrant workers and other people at risk, and to enhance efforts to find peaceful and just solutions to the crisis in Libya.

It is our considered opinion that the following specific needs to be addressed with immediate effect:

- Offering protection and assistance for the thousands of people who cannot return to their homes and countries;
- Keeping open the borders of Libya's neighbours in North Africa and Europe for migrants and people fleeing from conflict areas;
- Increasing international support to UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies to assist persons in need of safety, shelter and food;
- For member states of the European Union to respond positively to the initiative of the European Commissioner for Migration and Security, to resettle refugees and displaced persons from the region and to relocate asylum applicants from Malta, Italy and Greece to other EU member states; and
- For the governments involved in the crisis to work through the United Nations to promote a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Libya, to work for post-conflict solutions that serve the legitimate interests of all the people of Libya and to avoid further loss of life in the meantime.

• Statement by the WCC general secretary calling for peace talks in Libya, 4 May 2011

It is with great concern that we have been following the crisis and armed conflicts in Libya since February. The developments since then are dragging on with grave consequences, especially for civilians besieged by the armed forces and present regime of Colonel Gadhafi, also attacked in their homes and communities. We pray to God with concern and dismay, for mercy and for their safety. The protection of human lives and human rights must be a major priority for all authorities.

Considerable power and international political will has been mobilized to protect the safety and legitimate interests of the people of Libya. That power and will must be directed away from the use of armed force. It must be channelled into negotiations to end the bloodshed, to establish a lasting cease-fire and to prepare for a transitional, representative governmental authority that can tackle the difficult work of finding non-violent and just solutions.

We must also call attention to the many people who are bereaved, injured, giving care to the ever-increasing numbers of casualties, the displaced and all those at risk as a result of the on-going conflicts and violence in Libya today. May God be with them and save their lives. The

work of the ACT Alliance and other humanitarian organizations in border camps and resettlement programs deserves support. Countries, communities and churches who welcome refugees are showing the way forward with their actions.

International and regional support is needed for a negotiated political settlement to address the crisis in Libya, as well as for emergency relief and for the path toward peace with justice that must lie ahead.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Nigeria

- **Letter of concern over renewed violence in northern Nigeria, sent to H. E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, acting president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 10 March 2010**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to you to express our deep concerns regarding the recent violence and killings in three villages close to the northern city of Jos. This violence that broke out last weekend claiming many lives is an appalling situation.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of member churches from around the world including Nigeria, has been closely observing the deteriorating situation in Jos with great distress. We have learned that survivors of the recent massacres near Jos denounced the inaction of the authorities, and particularly the army, for their failure to prevent the violence. Seemingly it took the army two hours to react from the time a distress call was put through, which is unacceptable under any circumstances. Furthermore, we heard the news that the eruption of violence in Jos appears to have been carried out in retaliation for the attacks that took place on 19 January 2010 at Kuru Karama.

The ongoing conflicts and violence in several parts of Nigeria demonstrate that these unfortunate events are exacerbated due to various factors such as economic disparities, under-development, ethnic rivalries and struggle to control political power. It is also known that Nigeria's system of constitutionally classifying its citizens as "indigenes" and "settlers" further intensifies competing interests and conflicts. It is unfortunate that these constitutional flaws increase the violations of human rights and denial of justice and equity to all citizens of Nigeria irrespective of their religious and ethnic identities. This can lead to deepening ethnic and religious conflicts and as a result, the Nigerians tend to lose their sense of belonging and their spirit of communal harmony which allows them to live in peace.

It is in this context that we urge Your Excellency to bring to justice the perpetrators of these massacres and request that immediate action be taken to ensure the protection and security of every individual in Nigeria. As the violence and human rights violations are systematically orchestrated, innocent human beings are ultimately becoming the victims of these conflicts

which result in the deaths of hundreds of people every time. We, therefore, urge your immediate intervention to stop conflict, violence and human rights violations which affect Nigerian society all too frequently. As we fear that this deteriorating situation will ultimately enflame religious conflicts especially in the context that religion is being used for political and economic power struggles, we appeal to all people of goodwill to prevent such an eventuality.

It is our sincere hope that your government will take immediate measures to ensure security and peace with justice for all Nigerians. As members of churches who are committed to peace and justice of all God's creation, we pray that peace and reconciliation will prevail among all people and communities in your country.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Solidarity message from WCC general secretary to the WCC member churches in Nigeria regarding the massacres that took place in three villages close to the city of Jos, 11 March 2010**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with profound sadness that we received the news of the massacres that took place in three villages close to the city of Jos during the past weekend. Together with you, we condemn and deplore such barbaric acts of violence. It is tragic that the people of Nigeria are continuously affected by deadly violence and that innocent people are becoming victims of these conflicts.

I take this opportunity to extend our sincere condolences to the families of all those who have been killed and express our sympathy to all those who are suffering from the after effects of these traumatic experiences. We shall continue to pray for peace and reconciliation among the people and communities of your troubled region.

It is heartening that Nigerian church leaders have taken several initiatives together with other religious leaders to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected areas. In fact, I appreciate your initiatives as it is essential for us to demonstrate our faith and witness, to be ambassadors for peace and reconciliation in the true spirit of love for our neighbours, irrespective of their religious or ethnic identities.

I have written a letter of concern to His Excellency Mr Goodluck Jonathan, acting president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In my letter, I urged him to bring to justice the perpetrators of these massacres; to ensure security and peace with justice for all Nigerians and to preserve human rights, justice and equity for every individual in your country.

As you know that we are reminded of our call to seek justice and righteousness and it is imperative for strengthening our faith. This call also warrants our attention and need to be concerned of all those who are deprived of their inherent and inalienable rights and dignity, fullness of life and equal justice.

May God Almighty continue to strengthen you to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14).

Yours in Christ’s love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, acting president of Nigeria, expressing profound sorrow at the passing of president Mr Umaru Yar’ Ardua, 11 May 2010**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I take this opportunity to express our profound sorrow at the sad news of the passing of President Mr Umaru Yar’ Ardua.

The late President Ardua throughout his political career distinguished himself as a true leader and a man of peace. We remember that the late President Umaru Yar’ Ardua demonstrated an exemplary stewardship and was the first political leader who declared his personal assets while state governor as well as while he was the president of Nigeria. His timely action to bring peace to the complex Niger-Delta and the amnesty he declared will always be remembered in the history of Nigeria.

Your Excellency, as your nation and people mourn in this time of sorrow, may I extend our heartfelt condolences to the people of Nigeria, especially to the bereaved family of the late president. We thank God for his life and witness.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, the new president of Nigeria, on his swearing in, 11 May 2010**

Your Excellency,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

It gives me immense pleasure to extend, on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC), our warmest congratulations and sincere greetings to Your Excellency, as you are sworn in as the president of Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation.

Your Excellency, you have been providing leadership to your country in other capacities as the Vice-President and subsequently as the acting president.

With great interest we followed your inaugural address and found it very profound and reassuring. The priorities you underlined on that occasion, I am sure, will inspire many people

in Nigeria and on the African continent as a whole. It was heartening to read your Excellency's statement that "Our total commitment to good governance, electoral reforms and the fight against corruption would be pursued with greater vigour".

It was also encouraging for everybody concerned with the future of Nigeria that the efforts you envision for ensuring the sustenance of peace and development in the Niger Delta, as well as the security of life and property around the entire country, will be of the utmost importance during the remaining period of your administration.

Your Excellency, your tested, exemplary leadership qualities, your total commitment to lasting peace as proven in your past efforts to bring an inclusive solution to the complex problem of the Niger-Delta region, confirm that in your new role as president of Nigeria you will make qualitative changes. Though we cannot underestimate the challenges ahead of you we are confident that God's divine grace will enable you to lead your nation at this time of difficulty.

I want to assure Your Excellency of the WCC's full commitment and engagement in bringing about the peaceful co-existence of various ethnic and religious communities in Nigeria. Please accept the assurances of my prayers for God's richest blessings upon you and your nation.

Yours sincerely
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Follow-up action on the February 2010 WCC executive committee decision regarding the violation of human rights in the Niger Delta and Northern Nigeria: report from the "Living letters" pastoral solidarity visit to Nigeria, 15-20 May 2010**

a) Ecumenical celebration welcomes Living Letters team in Nigeria, 17 May 2010
A Living Letters team travelling on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC)was welcomed to Abuja by Nigerian church and ecumenical leaders during an ecumenical celebration organized by the Christian Council of Nigeria, (CCN) on Sunday 16 May.

The team arrived in the Nigerian capital city Abuja last Saturday. It was the first stop on their four-day solidarity visit to Africa's most populous nation. The CCN is an umbrella organization of all Protestant churches in Nigeria.

The service held at the Cathedral of Unity of the Methodist Church Nigeria in the capital city was attended by top Christian leaders from across the country. They included the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Roman Catholic John Onaiyekan, and the head of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Prelate Sunday Ola Makinde. The CAN comprises churches from all Christian traditions present in the country: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Evangelical and African Instituted Churches.

Preaching in front of hundreds of worshipers, Prelate Ola Makinde described the visit of the team as an expression of the worldwide solidarity of churches with fellow Christians in Nigeria. He added that the visit of the team demonstrates the love of Christ.

"By coming to visit the troubled spot in Nigeria you have followed the footsteps of Jesus Christ who went about doing good things, who cared for the marginalized, the homeless, the oppressed, and comforted those with broken hearts", the prelate said. He lamented that people in the northern part of the country have been neglected and denied basic rights and expressed hope that the visit of the Living Letters would give hope, encouragement, spirituality and strength to Nigerians for their Christian journey.

Later in the evening during a dialogue session between the members of the team and key Nigerian church leaders, CAN president Archbishop John Onaiyekan, speaking on behalf of the Nigerian churches and ecumenical organizations, expressed great delight at the solidarity of the team noting however that religious crises in Nigeria had become too frequent. He expressed hope that the team's visit would build confidence in the people especially the victims of the crisis.

During a meeting of the team with heads of churches of the Council of Churches in Nigeria, Archbishop Kehinde Stephen, who is the moderator of the WCC Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in 21st Century expressed the view that the WCC should be more dynamic and proactive on issues that concern Christians in Nigeria at this time of crisis. He expressed appreciation, however, for the visit of the Living Letters, which marks the first time people from different parts of the world come to show solidarity with Nigerians on behalf of the WCC.

The Living Letters team also took part in a religious service held for the new president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, and for the family of the former president, the late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua who died recently after a protracted illness.

At the service, the primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Nicholas Okoh, gave a sermon on "Servant leadership". He said the time had come for Nigerians to think of being productive rather than being consumers of goods brought from the western world. Greatness does not come from buying things for fashion, but from producing things, he said.

The team's day ended with a briefing on situations and issues related to the conflict in Jos, where more than 500 people were killed in ethnic violence in the early part of this year. The church leaders, including those from the conflict-affected Jos, opined that Jos had known peace for years and the situation in the troubled area could be traced to intolerance on the part of the different factions of people due to various reasons.

The members of the team will visit Jos in the Plateau State during the second part of their journey.

The Living Letters visit is being organized by the WCC in cooperation with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). The delegation is accompanied by WCC central committee members from Nigeria.

b) Governor of Nigeria's troubled Plateau State receives WCC delegation, 19 May 2010
During a meeting with a Living Letters team visiting Nigeria on behalf of the World Council of Churches, the governor of the Plateau state, Jonah David Jang said that "religion is used to cover up all conflicts, although other factors also exist". While explaining certain reasons for the conflicts, the governor admitted that "I am a committed Christian. As governor of this

state, I am elected by the people and God gave me the mandate to direct the people in the righteous way".

Jang, who is a minister of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), has been governor of the Plateau State for the past four years. Jos, the capital city of the state has seen one of the worst ethnic conflicts in recent years. In March, violence claimed more than hundred lives in the region of Jos. Most of those killed were Christians.

At the meeting, which had in attendance his deputy, Pauline Kedem Tallen, and some members of his cabinet, the governor said that Christianity and Islam had no reason to be at loggerheads. Jang said he was elated when he heard that the WCC team was coming to visit the state. "Your coming shows people are praying for us all over the world and this gives me joy."

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. One such team is visiting Nigeria 15-20 May.

Jang said that his government had begun to take proactive steps to promote peace. "We have set up an interreligious council of peace and harmony long before the crisis started. Right now we are adopting some other measures that we believe are yielding fruit presently," he said.

Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen of the Methodist Church Nigeria and Bishop Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah, vice-president of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and member of the WCC central committee, told the governor that the group had come on a solidarity visit to all who are suffering due to the conflicts and violence irrespective of their religious identities.

Archbishop Stephen said: "We believe that both the Christian and Muslim religions preach peace and are working for peace. We don't see any reason why there should be violence in this part of the country if there is tolerance among adherents of the two faiths."

He observed that the state had been bedevilled with several crises, noting however that religion has been used to cover other factors responsible from the incessant bloodletting in the state. He expressed the hope that the visit of the team would help bring about more unity and cooperation between the different faith communities.

He continued, "We are created by one God who gave us the right to be whatever we want to be. But one day has been appointed when we will account for all that we have done here on earth. We cannot decide for others the kind of faith they should adhere to. We can preach to people based on our beliefs but we cannot force anybody. The day is coming that we will all know who is right."

The governor, who was quite forthcoming during the meeting, said he had observed that Christianity is going down in the western world. He also added that, "however, it is time for the African continent to take the gospel back to those who brought it".

In responding to the governor's statements, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the WCC Commission on International Affairs, spoke to him about WCC programmes related to

peace and reconciliation, especially the Decade to Overcome Violence and the forthcoming International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011.

Representatives of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), the umbrella organization of the Protestant churches in the country, accompanied the team to the governor. The Living Letters team is composed of representatives of churches and WCC staff from Ghana, Kenya, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, India and Ethiopia.

c) WCC Living Letters team in Nigeria listens to survivors of violence, prays at mass grave, 20 May 2010

It was a deeply moving experience for the Living Letters team visiting Nigeria on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) when they gathered to pray around a mass grave in Dogonahawa, near Jos, in the Central Plateau State on Tuesday. About 323 locals murdered last March have been buried at the site.

In early March 501 people, mostly women and children from two adjacent villages, Dogonahawa and Bukuru, were killed in their sleep during an outburst of communal and ethnic violence.

Dogonahawa is a hamlet of about 100 houses, all clustered in a circle. It is located just seven miles from Jos, the capital city of the Plateau State. Vestiges of the sectarian clashes still surround the people. The community has been reduced to a ghost village as only a handful of people now live there.

Some of the villagers who welcomed the Living Letters team to their devastated village said life had not been the same again for them since the tragic events.

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. One such team travelled to Nigeria 15-20 May.

The team also visited the nearby town of Bukuru, which was equally deserted. An entire market had been burnt and hundreds of houses and shops destroyed. The local government premises were also razed. Reconstruction work is yet to begin in most of the affected quarters of Bukuru.

Most members of the team could not hide their grief as they met with men, women and children who lost loved ones. The team offered prayers at the site of the mass grave, where many relatives of the murdered were present.

The community leader David Jik told the Living Letters delegation how he lost his children and grandchildren during the violence. A 60-year old woman, Kumbo Chuwang, who was maimed during the violence, cried and explained how she and her family members had been attacked. A teenage boy, Tebita Danjuma, showed his body, burnt in the fire that was set to engulf the buildings in the hamlet.

The Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Bukuru Jwan B.N. Zhumbes, who accompanied the team to the villages, said several members of his church were killed in the violence, while many escaped and relocated in the wake of the crisis.

Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen, leader of the Christian Council of Nigeria that hosted the visiting Living Letters team, mentioned plans that were underway by the local communities to construct a cenotaph at the site of the mass grave.

Earlier in the day the team visited the Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN), an interfaith group based in Jos. Hajia Lantana Abdullahi, a Muslim woman who is the centre's programme director said her group had been working, especially with the youth, to ensure that various ethnic and religious communities live in harmony.

The chairman of the Plateau State division of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, of the Roman Catholic Church, welcomed the team stating that God wants us to be one. He added that the impression that Christians and Muslims in the state were fighting is not correct. "It is not the religions that are fighting but some people who adhere to the religions that are involved. There is no war between the two faiths," he said.

The Living Letters team was received at the headquarters of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN). Addressing the delegates to the COCIN 74th General Council, Bishop Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah, from Ghana, said Christians should work for peace and reconciliation even when they have been offended.

Aboagye-Mensah, who is the vice-president of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and a WCC central committee member, wondered if Christians in the state have been listening to what God is saying in the midst of the destruction they have found themselves.

Aboagye-Mensah asked: "Do we hear God's voice. What is God saying to us?" He said: "Christians have a challenge to work for peace. Peace and reconciliation begin with us. The offended one is to begin the process of reconciliation and peace."

The COCIN president Rev. Dr Pandang Yamsat affirmed the commitment of his church members to work for peace in the troubled areas, a task he sees as a prophetic witness of the church.

The Living Letters team was composed of representatives of churches and WCC staff from Ghana, Kenya, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, India and Ethiopia.

d) WCC Living Letters team calls on religions to work for peace in Nigeria, 26 May 2010

A World Council of Churches (WCC) Living Letters team has appealed to Nigeria's religious leaders to encourage people belonging to different ethnic and faith groups to take initiatives to promote lasting peace and harmony in violence-affected communities.

The international ecumenical team made its appeal as its 15-20 May visit to the country came to an end. During the visit the members of the team were able to see how ethnic consideration and lack of trust among various ethnic groups prevail while the authorities are unable to ensure security and protection to the people in conflict-affected regions.

After their 4-day visit to the country, members of the team observed that there is an urgent need to strengthen the security of Nigeria's most volatile regions. The team recommended that "the religious communities jointly appeal to the government and the security agencies to

be even-handed in their quest to bring peace to the Central Plateau State and neighbouring states and take measures to ensure that there will be free and fair elections in the upcoming polls".

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. One such team travelled to Nigeria, where in addition to the Central Plateau State, they visited the country's capital city Abuja.

At the end of their visit, the Living Letters team met with the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), an initiative of Christian and Muslim leaders set up three years ago to help stem the tide of communal violence in the country.

The council comprises of both Christians and Muslims, with administrative support being provided by the Nigerian government. It is currently headed by the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Roman Catholic Archbishop John Onayekan, and by the sultan of Sokoto, Haji Saad Abubakar who is the spiritual leader of the Muslim communities in Nigeria.

Members of NIREC present at the meeting included Archbishop Onayekan, Samuel Salifu, Hajia Bilikisu Yusuf and Aliyu Ocheje. During the 3-hour meeting the WCC team had the opportunity of sharing experiences and comparing notes with the NIREC members on their visit to the troubled region of Jos.

The members of the Living Letters team told the NIREC representatives that the visit of the ecumenical group had been a time of learning, listening and sharing experiences.

According to Outi Vasko, a WCC executive committee member from the Finnish Orthodox Church, the Living Letters team visit to Nigeria was very successful but also demanding since the team was able to meet victims and understand the difficulties that they are facing. The visit encouraged and strengthened the commitment of the local churches to work for peace.

Christians and Muslims are "in the same boat"

Archbishop Onayekan commended the Living Letters team for having travelled from all over the world to Nigeria. He said the two main religious communities in Nigeria are in the same boat. Nobody feels like minority and nobody feels like majority.

Onayekan observed that there was some kind of disconnect between the NIREC and the clerics of both faiths at the grassroots level: "There are many of my priests who don't consider my optimism for dialogue and this also applies to the other side. My conviction is that people living in the grassroots don't have problems living together but the imams and pastors leading them sometimes send wrong signals by the kind of messages they preach."

He also noted that the situation is somewhat difficult for NIREC because the people in government had sometimes used the perpetrators of violence for their political agendas.

While confessing that NIREC was still in its infancy, Hajia Bilikisu said the group had been instrumental in creating a multi-sector alliance on issues of development. She stated that NIREC had been useful in curtailing the violence in the country but she was critical of the

policies of the Nigerian government for its tardy response to security issues in the troubled regions. “The problem we are having is failure of security and failure of leadership”, she said.

Arne Saeveras of Norwegian Church Aid shared experiences of interfaith cooperation in Norway, where religious groups work together for peace and justice. Saeveras suggested that religious communities in Nigeria should “jointly advocate for the government to make immediate and sufficient provisions for security for all communities”.

“As law and order collapse, the security of people is often threatened”, said Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the WCC Commission on International Affairs. “Overt and covert alliances between political and religious organizations often lead to conflicts in communities. It is in this context that legal measures to separate politics from religion should be pursued as a matter of state policy through appropriate structural changes or statutory instruments in the country”.

Dr Johnson Mbillah of the All Africa Conference of Churches stated that the way towards sustainable peace depends on overcoming mutual suspicions among divided communities and on restoring confidence and willingness to talk across the religious divide.

The Living Letters Team visit to Nigeria was organized by the WCC in collaboration with the AACC. The members of the team were:

- Bishop Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah, vice-president of All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), WCC central committee member, Ghana;
- Rev. Dr Volker Faigle, Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD);
- Rev. Dr Johnson Mbillah, general adviser, Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), Ghana/Kenya;
- Ms Mbari Kioni, director of advocacy at the AACC, Kenya;
- Archbishop Daniel Okoh, Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), Nigeria;
- Mr Arne Saeveras, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), Norway;
- Mr Jan Guehne, Mission 21, Switzerland/Germany/Nigeria;
- Ms Outi Vasko, Orthodox Church of Finland, WCC executive committee member;

WCC staff:

- Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs;
- Dr Nigussu Legesse, programme executive for Africa.

The team was accompanied by WCC central committee members and other Christian leaders from Nigeria:

- Ms Iyabo Oyekola, Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, WCC executive committee member;
- Ms Helen Ubon Usung, Presbyterian Church of Nigeria; WCC central committee member;
- Archbishop Kehinde Stephen, Methodist Church Nigeria, moderator of the WCC Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in 21st Century
- Rev. Samuel Obafemi Ogbe, general secretary of the Christian Council of Nigeria
- Rev. Babatunde Olusegun, programme director of the Christian Council of Nigeria.

e) Development and justice needed to address communal conflicts in Nigeria, 27 May 2010

Although it is often portrayed as a religious conflict, the crisis in Nigeria's Central Plateau State is of social and economic nature, the country's foreign minister told church representatives. The church delegation advocated for government action to develop the area and to bring to trial those responsible for an outburst of communal violence last March.

For Nigeria's minister of Foreign Affairs Henry Odein, the country faces "a lot of challenges which are largely misunderstood by the international community".

The situation in the central Plateau State, where several hundred people were killed last March, is "much more complicated" than it is usually portrayed, Odein argued. According to him, the religious factor compounds a conflict between an indigenous population and an immigrant community in that area. "The issues are of social and economic nature", he said.

Odein expressed his views at a meeting with the World Council of Churches (WCC) programme executive for Africa Dr Nigussu Legesse and the programme director of the Christian Council of Nigeria Rev. Babatunde Olusegun on 21 May.

The church representatives met the minister at his residence in Abuja on behalf of a WCC Living Letters team that had visited the country 15-20 May. "We came here in solidarity with the people of Nigeria", Legesse told Odein, explaining the purpose of the WCC Living Letters visit.

"We visited the villages near Jos, in the Plateau State. We were in Bukuru, where houses and markets were burnt and in Dogonahawa, where 323 people killed last March have been buried in a mass grave. We have met the survivors, talked to them, listened to them and prayed along with them and assured them that the global community of churches is with them in their moment of crisis", Legesse said.

Legesse urged the minister to "help facilitate development in Jos through the federal government". He pleaded that those responsible for the killings are brought before the court of law, "as the question of impunity was a concern widely mentioned by the people we met during our visits".

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. The team visiting Nigeria was made of representatives of churches and WCC staff from Ghana, Kenya, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, India and Ethiopia.

- **Statement of the WCC executive committee on the situation in Nigeria, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010**

1. Nigeria – the most populous country in Africa, a global oil producer, a leader intheEconomic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and a major peacekeeping contributing country – has been wracked by a series of crises. The country has been characterized as deeply divided in which major political issues are violently contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious and regional divisions. Although the nation has annual oil revenues in the billions of dollars the majority of Nigerians live on what amounts to less than a dollar a day.

2. While democracy permits greater freedom of religious expression in Nigeria in the post-military regime, frictions between ethnic groups have been increasing in several parts of the country. The ethnic conflicts and disputes over land and resources often crystallize as religious conflicts. During the past few years thousands of people have been killed in ethnic clashes and communal violence. Behind these conflicts lie the economic and political interests of the elite in each state.

3. Many Nigerians consider that the real reason for the violence is not ethnic or religious difference but the greed for land, control of resources and political clout. Poverty, joblessness and corrupt politics drive religious extremists from both sides to commit horrendous atrocities. Politicization of religion and the rise of religious fundamentalism are increasing trends in many parts of the country.

4. The Plateau State in northern Nigeria is often affected with horrendous inter-ethnic clashes. Earlier in 2010 more than 500 people were killed in communal violence near the city of Jos.What began as a competition between Muslim cattle herders from the north and Christian farmers from the south was portrayed as a religious conflict. Although religion plays a major role in the context, the fact remains that the real reason for the conflict is between settled, indigenous farmers and nomadic herdsmen who belong to different religious groups.

5. Meanwhile the competition for oil wealth has been fuelling violence between different ethnic groups further south in the Niger Delta. The situation has intensified militarization in the entire region. It is commonly perceived that the militia groups and gangs have sufficient firepower seriously to challenge the authority of Nigeria's military and police forces. The plight of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta is another major problem, which has yet to be resolved.

6. The World Council of Churches (WCC), the ecumenical movement and wider international community have been highlighting the ethnic and environmental rights of the Ogoni people at various international fora.

7. The absence of law enforcement mechanisms and increase in criminal activities and social disintegration are major concerns to Nigerians. Human rights groups and civil society organizations have pointed out serious violations of human rights, especially extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and other unlawful killings in several parts of the country. In any context where human rights and human dignity have been systematically abused, victims and witnesses deserve to be protected and any evidence gathered needs to be preserved. However, experiences in Nigeria have proved that victims of crimes and human rights violations are fearful of seeking justice because of growing impunity from prosecution enjoyed by those perpetuating crimes. It is imperative, therefore, to determine whether crimes have been committed which fall within the purview of the International Criminal Court (ICC), especially since Nigeria is party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

8. The World Council of Churches and its member churches in Nigeria have been concerned about the deteriorating situation there. On several occasions recently, WCC General Secretaries have expressed their concern to the authorities in Nigeria and also expressed pastoral solidarity to churches in the country. In May 2010 the WCC organized a Living Letter Team visit to Nigeria in collaboration with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). The team visited the conflict-affected areas in the Plateau State and the capital of the country, met with various church and ecumenical leaders in the country and also with the victims of human rights violations in Jos. Nigeria requires honest and capable leadership and good governance to reduce the level of

unemployment, poverty, oppression, domination and marginalization and to raise the standard of living for all Nigerians.

While the WCC continues to be concerned about the situation in Nigeria, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010:

A. ***Calls*** on all ethnic and religious groups to support and encourage peace and reconciliation, communal and religious harmony, at all levels in Nigerian society;

B. ***Expresses*** its grave concern concerning extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and other killings in Nigeria;

C. ***Urges*** the government of Nigeria to act promptly to investigate, prosecute and take action against those responsible for the crimes;

D. ***Urges*** the federal and state governments to take adequate measures to ensure the rule of law and to reassure the victims on all sides, in order to rebuild the confidence of the communities that government cares about their wellbeing;

E. ***Requests*** member churches, ecumenical agencies and councils of churches to keep the situation in Nigeria under close review and to advocate with their respective governments and regional and international governmental bodies to help the Nigerian government make qualitative differences in improving the human rights situation, good governance and democratic principles;

F. ***Encourages*** the churches in Nigeria in their witness for human rights, justice and peace in Nigeria through interfaith efforts to promote peace, reconciliation and overcoming of violence;

G. ***Assures*** the churches in Nigeria of the fervent prayers and support of the WCC as they continue to bear witness and assume the burden of costly discipleship.

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the secretary general of the United Nations, following the 26 August bombing of the UN building in Abuja, Nigeria, 30 August 2011**

Your Excellency,

It is with profound sadness that we received the news of the attack on the United Nations House in Abuja, Nigeria, on Friday, 26 of August with a car bomb. I take this opportunity to extend our heart-felt condolences to you, all the staff and the families of your colleagues who were killed in the attack and our prayers for all those injured and traumatized by this dreadful crime.

I understand that these buildings housed many humanitarian and development agencies of the UN family and that many of the victims of this attack had devoted their time and life to a mission of helping others.

Likewise, in targeting the UN Staff, the perpetrators have exhibited an abysmal disregard for the commitment of the UN and the international community, especially their efforts toward peace-building. We condemn this senseless act of violence carried out against innocent

workers of the UN and the UN family of agencies. It is in every aspect unjustifiable and those responsible for this attack must be held accountable.

I would also like to take this opportunity to let you know that the World Council of Churches (WCC) convened an international ecumenical peace convocation in May of this year in Kingston, Jamaica. The nearly one thousand participants issued a common message. The first line of that message reads, "We understand peace and peace-making as an indispensable part of our common faith." It goes on to say "...violence is contrary to the will of God and can never resolve conflicts. " It further reminds all of us that we all have "a day-to-day responsibility to prevent, that is, to avoid violence at its root."

The WCC is working at various levels to promote Just Peace and stresses the importance of peace for all, urging all to reject violence and provocation.

On behalf of the WCC once again I extend our sincere condolences and offer our prayers.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, President of the Republic of Nigeria, expressing deep sadness over the current wave of violence in Nigeria, 26 January 2012**

Your Excellency,

We are deeply saddened by the continuing violence and social upheaval in Nigeria and pray that peace with justice will come soon for the Nigerian people. We continue to mourn the loss of life particularly among those who were killed in brutal attacks this past weekend in Kano and the attacks on and deaths of Christian worshipers celebrating the mass service of Christmas in Abuja only a month ago.

We must remain prayerful and vigilant regarding the developments in Nigeria as they are potentially destabilizing not only for Nigeria itself but for countries in Africa and other regions. We ask the WCC member churches from around the world to pray for Nigeria. We also believe that those who have perpetrated these crimes must be brought to justice and that the healing begins for those who are suffering.

The actions of Nigeria's Christian and Muslim leaders working together to end the violence is a contribution that will ultimately allow both communities to live in peace. Nigeria cannot become another battlefield where religion is used to promote division, hatred and allowing for destructive intentions. Christians and Muslims around the world offer their support to our sisters and brothers in Nigeria to enable them to live together in peace.

We ask that from your position you continue to encourage those who are seeking peace in Nigeria and those who desire that Muslim and Christian stand side by side in solidarity with the people of Nigeria.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, we would like to express our condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families and all victims affected by these attacks. The World Council of Churches strongly condemns these wanton and barbaric attacks of terrorism and violence which target innocent human lives.

May God almighty heal the deep wounds, protect all God's children and help them to overcome hatred, intolerance and violence.

Sincerely yours in Christ, our common Lord
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Joint statement issued by a high-level international delegation of Christian and Muslim leaders promoting interreligious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions, 25 May 2012**

We are a delegation of Muslims and Christians from a number of countries around the world, with senior roles in our respective religious communities. We have come on this working visit to Nigeria, under the auspices of the Royal Jordanian Aal Al Bayt Institute and the World Council of Churches, to express to the people of Nigeria, and to their religious and political leadership, the concerns and anxieties of the international community about the current situation in this country.

We also come here to express our solidarity and our prayers for all the people of Nigeria and in particular those who have been the victims of violence in any form. We have been told that we are the first high-level international interreligious delegation of Christians and Muslims to visit Nigeria, certainly in recent years. We have valued being accompanied also in our visit by a number of Nigerian Christian and Muslim religious leaders. We hope by our visit to demonstrate an international model of Muslims and Christians working together in interreligious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions. We bear witness that we believe that both Christianity and Islam are religions which long for peace, and that in both our faiths love of God and love of our neighbour must belong together.

Before coming to your country, in preparation for our visit, we met with the ambassadors of Nigeria in a number of our own lands. One ambassador, in commending the visit, challenged the group to 'Seek out the truth and share it.' This we have sought to do, and will seek to follow up, in spite of the inevitable constraints on our work due to the length of our visit. As well as meeting members of the Muslim and Christian communities here in Abuja, we have visited Kaduna and Jos and met with community representatives in both places.

In hearing the pain of those who have spoken to us we also caught a glimmer of their dreams, and the hopes of many, both religious leaders and ordinary people, that a transformed reality is possible. We express our admiration of all those who spoke to us in a way that made it clear that they did not want their faith to be used as a pretext to propagate violence. We look forward to the day when the Christians and Muslims of Nigeria may offer an example of working together to the international community.

We now need to digest what we have seen, heard and experienced, and we are committed to writing a detailed report of our experiences within the coming month. In this we will make some recommendations as well as specific suggestions relating to our own continued commitment to the welfare of Nigeria and Nigeria's people.

We have been very grateful for the welcome and hospitality we have received during our visit. We give particular thanks for the preparatory work and support of the Christian Council of Nigeria and the office of the Sultan of Sokoto, without which our work here would not have been possible.

- **Communiqué on joint commitment of the WCC and the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (RABIIT) following the high-level interreligious delegation's visit to Nigeria, 22-26 May 2012**

The WCC and RABIIT want to offer – by the grace of God – an on-going commitment to the situation in Nigeria. The following specific projects have been agreed upon (the first three being specifically formulated to combat the purely religious aspects of the problems in Nigeria):

a. WCC and RABIIT plan, God willing, to publish, separately, substantial volumes on the theology of peace in their respective religions and to publish them in Nigeria with Nigerian participation and, if possible, translate them into languages. WCC and RABIIT also plan, God willing, to try to ensure that these texts make their way into Nigerian school and university religious curricula.

b. WCC and RABIIT plan, God willing, to work together to encourage publication by a group of Nigerian Christians and Muslims a booklet in popular format distilling the understanding of peace and harmony in both Christian and Muslim Scriptures and, if possible, translate them into languages. WCC and RABIIT also plan, God willing, to try to ensure that this text makes its way into Nigerian school and university religious and civic curricula.

c. WCC and RABIIT plan, God willing, to work with individuals and institutions in Nigeria to develop a common statement for people to sign, based on both their religious traditions, pledging themselves to work for the peace and wellbeing of Nigeria. WCC and RABIIT also plan, God willing, to try to ensure that this common statement makes its way into Nigerian school and university religious and civic curricula.

d. WCC and RABIIT will, God willing, seek partners to enable the opening of a neutral information-collection and archive centre, ideally both virtually and on the ground in Nigeria, which will facilitate the sharing of stories, allow the voices of those who feel themselves voiceless to be heard and recorded, and assist with the collecting of accurate data about incidents of violence, online and through hotlines. The aim of this will be to make an accurate, impartial and indelible record of injustices, violence and atrocities which can serve not only as a deterrent but also as an honest starting point for future solutions.

e. WCC and RABIIT will, God willing, stand ready for other projects, within their capacities, that Nigeria may need or request in the future.

f. WCC and RABIIT may—if funds and interested and suitable partners are found—also help to raise international awareness on the Nigeria issue, by organizing a conference or by including the topic in major international conferences or forums on religious discourse. This could help raise the profile for the need for assistance from all quarters, before the problem explodes even further.

The crisis in Nigeria must no longer be seen as a localized issue.

Sierra Leone

- **Report from WCC delegation visit to Sierra Leone expressing deep concern over deplorable prison conditions, 1 November 2011**

"We are packed inside prison walls like sardines in a plastic carton", says 22-year-old Ibrahim, who has been imprisoned at the Pademba Road Prison in Freetown, Sierra Leone since September.

Ibrahim made his comments to members of a World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation, which visited central prison in late October as part of a human rights training programme in Sierra Leone.

His honest account about living conditions in prison was echoed by fellow inmates, who clapped their hands to support him while he spoke. These prisoners gathered in an open space inside the prison compound where they spoke to the WCC delegation along with prison officials.

The delegation included human rights defenders from Togo, Ivory Coast, Libreria, Guinea and Sierra Leone, along with WCC staff.

Ibrahim was jailed for the offense of driving on an unauthorized route. He cannot afford a lawyer nor arrange for his bail. He is not the only one in this situation. Several prisoners shared stories of their imprisonment, complaining about the living conditions in the prison.

Fifteen prisoners, who were allowed to speak in front of the officers, said they have had no trial. Most of them were imprisoned for months and years, and had no means to afford legal aid. Several were in for petty crimes, which could have been settled by the police, or through traditional African ways of dispute settlement.

The WCC delegation also visited prison cells. They found conditions inside the cells to be very poor and in violation of basic human rights. They witnessed prisoners crammed into dirty cells, exposed to infections, with inadequate food, drinking water and sanitary facilities. There was no bedding provided for most of the prisoners, and many had to sleep on the floor.

The central prison which has the capacity to accommodate around 350 prisoners was packed with 1,243 prisoners. Out of this number, 362 are on remand awaiting court trial, two were

sentenced to life imprisonment, while the rest are imprisoned without trial awaiting prosecution.

Seeking justice, waiting for a fair trial

Aaffi Alaffman, a member of the WCC delegation, who works to provide free legal aid to such prisoners, said, "Anyone accused of a certain crime should be brought before a court of law within a time limit, and the trial should be arranged. However there is a serious dearth of such arrangements in our legal system".

Alaffman's concern is significant, as the accused when held in custody with pending trial, are entitled to treatment in accordance with the United Nations Minimum Standard Rules of Detention.

"Fair treatment for a prisoner is denied in Sierra Leone's present situation", lamented another legal practitioner Dauie Cole, who facilitated the WCC delegation's interactions with the prisoners.

Prison conditions in Sierra Leone reflect gaps in standard judicial mechanisms. The country has inherited a colonial legal system, which is outdated, and this impacts its legal system in many ways. This is one reason why the government is unable to guarantee protection of human rights. The convicted people are living in conditions which are neither in line with the national laws nor consistent with international standards.

The delegation stressed the government's obligation to protect prisoners from "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment". The prisoners did not complain about torture inside the prison.

The WCC delegation expressed deep concern over the situation. They recalled recommendations made during the Universal Periodic Review of Sierra Leone at the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2011, urging the government to improve conditions in prisons and detention centres, creating accessibility to legal representation, strengthening legal aid programmes, and diminishing lengthy periods of detentions without trial.

Somalia

- **Statement adopted by WCC executive committee on a call to promote peace and human security in Somalia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-16 September 2011**

1. Somalia has been undergoing a serious humanitarian crisis for the past several years. The country has been ruled by an ineffective national government for more than twenty years. The most recent Transitional Federal Government (TFG), established in January 2009, remains ineffective and confined only to part of the country and is affected with internal disagreements. The government's survival is dependent on the troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia – AMISOM. The underlying factors contributing to the vulnerability in the country, which pose serious threats to peace and human security, are poverty, unemployment, conflicts, underdevelopment, famine and drought. More than four million

people are affected by conflicts, drought and famine in Somalia with one fifth of the nation's people displaced and half a million people having fled their homeland in search of basic food support in the neighbouring countries of Kenya and Ethiopia. Food shortage, starvation, malnutrition and massive displacement are exacerbated by insecurity which prevents even aid workers from accessing the worst affected areas. 1.8 million children, of an estimated 2.3 million or more than 70 percent, are not able to attend schools. The TFG is in no position to deal with a humanitarian catastrophe or to protect its citizens as Al-Shabaab and other extremist groups operating in many parts of the country are virtually controlling these areas. At the same time, Al-Shabaab refuses to come to the negotiating table.

2. The ongoing conflicts in Somalia have been fuelled by various factors including inter-clan rivalry, widespread possession of weapons and external support and funding of miscreants in attempts to abate violence in society. While clan factionalism continues to be a widespread reality, there is a great pool of illegal weapons available in the country. Many young people have grown up in an atmosphere of violence. Lacking opportunities for basic education, and other skills, more and more young people have been easily influenced and manipulated on the promise of quick financial gains by people who seek to mobilize them for political motives. Strategic interests from within and outside Somalia have sought military solutions to the many years of conflict which began with the military coup in the country in 1969. However, it became evident over the years that the military solutions have not resulted in peace in Somalia. The conflicts in Somalia have led to the breakdown of local governments, increasing of criminal actions and the destruction of basic service units such as clinics and schools in many areas. Several parts of Somalia today are experiencing a multi-faceted, chaotic, clan-driven and virtually countrywide revolt against the TFG at the centre.

3. The drought has caused an additional burden as many families, reliant on livestock, have lost their animals. Several areas of southern Somalia are considered to be in famine conditions and more regions of south Somalia are likely to face famine in the coming months. According to the report of the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, food access is estimated to be below 2,100 calories per day for at least 20 percent of the population in Somalia. The number of malnourished children across the country continues to rise, and it is estimated by the Somalia Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit of the Food and Agricultural Organization that one third of all Somali children face acute malnutrition. The health situation is deteriorating in many places, and cholera and measles are both on the rise.

4. While the drought situation in the country may be regarded as a short-term phenomenon, the rebuilding of Somalia needs long-term commitment from all parties concerned. The upcoming national election, scheduled by August 2012, and plans for the ratification of a national Constitution, are windows of opportunity to seek a nonviolent solution for Somalia. In this regard, the role of the international community is very significant. A clear road map for development needs to be agreed and supported by the political leadership, the Somalia diaspora and the international community. It is in this context that we see peacekeeping, disarmament, conflict resolution, promotion of nonviolence and dialogue, with the aim of a negotiated political settlement embracing all clan interests, as key to a lasting peace in Somalia. It is high time that all governments and organizations which have been supplying various of the country's factions with armaments and financial support to rethink their strategies that abet violence in Somalia, and instead evolve a strategy to find more meaningful ways to ensure peace and human security in Somalia. The international community should take initiatives to give opportunities for Somalis to live in peace with justice, security,

freedom from fear and hunger, and to have adequate means to live with dignity, develop and determine their own future.

In recognizing the major humanitarian crisis of Somalia and the need for ensuring human security in all parts of this conflict-ridden country, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 13 to 16 September 2011:

A. ***Appeals*** to the international community and aid agencies to continue to support the immediate emergency needs of the Somali people with adequate funding;

B. ***Calls*** on all actors in Somalia to provide access for humanitarian assistance to all those who have been denied access to food supply;

C. ***Calls*** on governments and organizations which have been responsible for widespread distribution of armaments in Somalia to stop the supplying of armaments to Somalia;

D. ***Urges*** international organizations, especially various United Nations-related bodies, the African Union and the Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD) to work out a time-bound action plan for disarmament and rehabilitation of youth, demilitarization of Somali society, and promotion of nonviolence, peace and reconciliation;

E. ***Urges***the international community to assist the TFG in de-centralizing the system of administration by providing delegated authority and resources to allied local administrations and groups;

F. ***Encourages*** the TFG to draw up a comprehensive plan of actions for national reconciliation as a priority by reactivating and reconstituting the moribund Reconciliation Commission with a broader mandate and membership that will include all sectors in society;

G. ***Calls*** on the African Union to develop an appropriate political strategy to accompany the peace and reconciliation mission in Somalia rather than investing resources in increasing the number of AMISOM troops on the ground;

H. ***Urges*** governments and humanitarian aid agencies to take care of the basic needs of all internally displaced people in Somalia, as well as those who have fled their homeland due to hunger and starvation;

I. ***Welcomes***the initiatives of several WCC member churches in extending support to humanitarian aid to Somalia and invites other churches also to extend support;

J. ***Appreciates***the efforts of the ACT Alliance and other ecumenical partners to provide humanitarian aid assistance to Somali people;

K. ***Calls***on WCC member churches to keep the people of Somalia in their prayers.

South Africa

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Mr Edwin Makue, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, on the death of Mrs Sheena Duncan, 6 May 2010**

Dear Mr Makue,

We have received the news of the death of Mrs Sheena Duncan with a deep sense of loss and sadness.

We would like to join the South African Council of Churches and several others around the world who were committed to the vision of an apartheid free South Africa to thank God for her life and witness on the one hand and for the memories and models that she has left behind on the other.

While paying these tributes to her in gratitude for her partnership in the struggle, I would also like to acknowledge what she was known for – her exemplary leadership to the church organizations for which she was responsible, for the Black Sash movement and for her outstanding contribution to the causes of justice, human rights and political freedom. The Black Sash movement has inspired other movements of "women in black" in their witness for reconciliation and Just Peace.

My heartfelt condolences to the family and to the SACC.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **80th Birthday greetings from WCC general secretary to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 7 October 2011**

Your Eminence,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

I write to you on behalf of the World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of 349 churches in more than 110 countries and territories seeking unity, a common witness and Christian service with which you are very well acquainted to offer birthday greetings. We give thanks to God for the lives you have positively influenced in your 80 years. Your life is a sterling demonstration of commitment to a clear faith in God's constant presence.

I am thankful for your long support and partnership with the World Council of Churches, as well as the work of the Norwegian church partners, particularly related to the long anti-apartheid struggle. The last time I had the opportunity to personally engage you was in Copenhagen as we met to struggle with the difficult questions related to climate change. I felt then, as I have often, the spiritual strength and encouragement of your presence and your leadership. My faith in the God of justice and love is certainly strengthened by you.

Yours is perhaps the most recognized Christian face and voice. We are thankful for your faithful witness and your steadfast leadership in the ecumenical movement as you have tirelessly worked for peace and justice. You have continued to use your recognition as a faith and world leader and Nobel Peace Laureate to be the public voice of and to champion the causes of those who are often voiceless and powerless, receiving no recognition – those Christ

called “the least of these”. Your warm and convincing expression of the Christian faith deserves to be emulated by all who bear the name of Christian.

On this anniversary of your birth, we thank you and our God for your life and pray that God will continue to bless you with strength and witness for the work that still lies before you as you seek to faithfully live out our calling in Christ Jesus.

Yours in unity and solidarity,
Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary

- **Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the Marikana-Lonmin massacre, Kolympari, Crete, Greece, 28 August–25 September 2012**

It is with great dismay that the World Council of Churches received the news about the Marikana-Lonmin massacre in South Africa on 16th August. The clash between the protesting mine workers, mine managers and police resulted in the deaths of 34 protesting mine workers on 16 August at the Marikana-Lonmin, which is one of the worst death tolls in violent protests since 1994. A total of 44 people have lost their lives, including 10 others (eight mine workers and two police officers) who were killed in conflicts in the weeks leading up to the incident on 16 August. In addition to the deaths, 78 people were injured. At the present time, communities, the families of the victims, police officers and the workers have all been traumatized by the violence and shootings at Marikana.

In many ways, the member churches of the WCC, in many parts of the world, have found great inspiration and hope in the peaceful transition from apartheid in South Africa. We believe that the people of South Africa have set an incredible example for the rest of the world in their work to undo the devastating history of apartheid in ways that are rooted in truth, reconciliation, forgiveness and non-violence. The WCC continues to believe that on-going situations of conflict and challenge can – and must – be addressed in ways that do not resort to the use and/or threat of such destructive violence as occurred in the Marikana situation.

For a long period of time, the plight of mine workers in South Africa has been characterized by low wages, exploitative working conditions and poor housing and is therefore a matter of serious concern that needs to be addressed urgently. While the mine workers continue to live in inhumane conditions and in abject poverty, those who are managing the mine fields amass enormous wealth. In the 18 years of democracy the South African government has failed in its policies to effectively redistribute the wealth and natural resources of the country in its transition from an era of apartheid to democracy. This has led to increasing trends of deep social and racial divisions leading to mistrust, crime and violence in society. The consequences of this are frustration and alienation which contribute to situations such as the unrest in Marikana-Lonmin. It is also a matter of serious concern that violence continues to be a matter of daily experience for many South Africans.

As the South African Council of Churches (SACC) observes in a recent statement, issued in August 2012, that the inhabitants of the earth have an inherent right to participate and share in the wealth of their nations. The World Council of Churches joins and affirms this position by

calling for a more concerted effort at addressing the issue of the gap between the rich and the poor. According to a number of important economic and social indicators, South Africa is currently one of the most unequal societies in the world and unless this disparity between the rich and the poor is addressed then social dissension is likely to continue. In particular the central committee of the World Council of Churches joins the SACC and the churches of Southern Africa in their call for examining the living conditions and the wages of workers *vis a vis* the profits of mining companies in the country.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches is shocked at the blanket charge of murder at all the workers who were protesting against their poor wages. While we decry the violence that some of the workers committed in this situation, the central committee is shocked at the use of an apartheid law on a case such as this. This law which criminalizes everyone who was part of the protest action, irrespective of what they did, is unjust and not good for democracy.

The WCC stands in solidarity with the churches of South Africa as they seek to minister and bring healing to the families that lost their loved ones in the massacre, and to all who have been affected by this terrible situation. We pray with the Churches and the people of the Region – "God of life; lead us to justice and peace".

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012, therefore:

A. ***Laments*** the tragic events that occurred at Marikana and prays for comfort, healing and peace in the lives of all those affected;

B. ***Encourages*** all the concerned parties to return to the negotiating table with the view to ending the impasse and enabling the protesters to return to work;

C. ***Supports*** the establishment of commission of enquiry in response to this tragic situation and hopes that it will identify the root causes of this conflict, bring to justice those who are responsible, and establish fair, just and non-violent methods of conflict resolution in potentially volatile situations;

D. ***Calls*** on the South African government to address the historical economic and social injustices that continue to affect mining communities and mine workers in South Africa and the region;

E. ***Expresses concern*** about the use of the "Common Purpose" law in relation to this situation and urges the civil authorities to prosecute those individuals who are directly responsible for the deaths that occurred; and

F. ***Stands in solidarity*** with the churches in Southern Africa which are seeking to bring healing by accompanying the community of Marikana and all those that have been affected by the recent events.

• A tribute to Nelson Mandela by WCC general secretary, 6 December 2013

Remembering Nelson Mandela – a gift to the one humanity

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
(2 Timothy 4:7)

We give thanks to God for the life of Nelson Mandela, a gift to his own nation of South Africa but also a gift to the whole world, to the one humanity. There was no one like him. His moral authority, his hard-won wisdom and maturity in political leadership were unparalleled in our time. He showed that justice can be established with peace.

For most, he will be recalled as the leader who acted to unify a nation once deliberately divided along the lines of race. He will be remembered as a liberator who by force of his remarkable personality raised the dignity of Africans after centuries of colonialism, oppression and discrimination. He will be remembered as an architect and builder of democracy and the rule of law, through truth and reconciliation. And, of course, we will recall him as the first president of a fully free and democratic South Africa.

Nelson Mandela will be remembered as one of the most deserving laureates in the history of the Nobel Prize for Peace. It is an example of his strength of character and irenic personality that he willingly shared the award with F.W. de Klerk despite the decades he had spent in prison, despite the lives forfeited in civil strife, despite all the tensions in these co-recipients' past.

The values he exemplified were those of love, life, justice, peace and dignity.

He firmly believed that humanity is one, and he rallied us together – people of all races, religions and walks of life – in the struggle to bring about a universal consciousness of our unity as human beings and our interdependence.

The relationship of President Mandela to the World Council of Churches is particularly dear to us. Soon after his release from prison, he visited our Geneva offices in June 1990 to express his gratitude for the churches' support of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Later, as South Africa's president in December 1998, he spoke at our Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. Again he expressed his gratitude to the churches of the World Council, as well as to earlier generations of Christian missionaries who brought high standards of education to Africa and provided his early schooling.

At the 1998 Assembly, he told us:

"…you have to have been in an apartheid prison in South Africa to appreciate the further importance of the church. They tried to isolate us completely from the outside. Our relatives could see us only once every six months. The link was religious organizations, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and members of the Jewish faith. They were the faithful who inspired us.

"The WCC's support exemplified in the most concrete way the contribution that religion made to our liberation. From the days when religious bodies took responsibility for the education of the oppressed because it was denied by our rulers, to support for our liberation struggle, whenever the noble ideals and values of religion have been joined with practical action to realize them, it has strengthened us and at the same time nurtured those ideals within the liberation movement.

"It is therefore a matter of pride to us that democratic South Africa has a constitution that embodies those values and ideals in whose name we enjoyed the support of the international community in our striving for freedom and justice.

"Those ideals and values must be our guide in the unfinished journey we have travelled together …"

The values that Mandela lived were derived from the traditions of his people, consistent with the best teaching of his Christian educators and the ecumenical movement. They are values that inspired the long walk from apartheid to freedom and that transformed South Africa during his presidency. They are ideals that have much to contribute to the continuing life of his country and every country.

As he came to the close of his remarks at the Harare Assembly, Mandela paid the missionaries and his audience the great compliment of saying that by their faith and action they shared in the "distinction of immortality" as "men and women whose names will live beyond the grave and down the centuries. It is because of this that I put aside everything to take the opportunity to come and say thank you for all you did for each and every one of us."

I am convinced that it is entirely accurate to say of him that his name "will live beyond the grave and down the centuries." Indeed, as is said in the Orthodox tradition of Christianity: May his memory be eternal!

He has fought the good fight, he has finished the race, he has kept the faith. His example will continue to inspire us to do the same, for the sake of the one humanity.

South Sudan

- **Statement of the WCC executive committee on the upcoming referendum in Southern Sudan, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010**

1. The executive committee of the World Council of Churches meeting 14-17 Sept, 2010, in Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, calls on all parties in Sudan to adhere to Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), keep to the timetable for the upcoming referendum and assure security for all people.

2. Sudan has experienced one of the longest-running conflicts in Africa. The conflict between north and south Sudan lasted four decades, killed more than 2 million people, destroyed the infrastructure of the country, eroded its economic resources and caused suffering to millions of people.

3. With the signing of the CPA in 2005 this prolonged war ended. The CPA was the result of tireless diplomatic efforts led by the East African regional organization, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and was supported and accompanied by the international community. The CPA has been considered one of the most successful diplomatic efforts in recent years. Even with the international community's support and efforts the CPA was nonetheless a Sudanese agreement and became a major step forward by the leadership of both the rebel Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the National Congress Party (NCP)-led government in Khartoum.

4. The CPA established a framework with a six-year transition period guaranteeing de-facto autonomy for Southern Sudan, a unity government in Khartoum and incorporated agreements on security, boundaries, revenue sharing from southern oil fields and the administration of three contested areas straddling the north and the south. Under a new constitution that emerged from the CPA, national elections were held in April 2010. As per the agreement, Southern Sudan is scheduled to hold a self-determination referendum in January 2011.

While the WCC and its member churches continue to pray for a solution that will bring lasting peace and reconciliation in Sudan, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010:

A. ***Calls*** all those concerned to work for free, fair and peaceful referendum in 2011 and for referendum guarantors to ensure that the referenda are held on 9th January 2011 as provided for in the CPA and agreed upon in the Referendum Acts of December 2009;

B. ***Urges*** the NCP, the SPLM and all political parties and the people of Sudan to fulfill their obligations in the spirit of the CPA and for the guarantors of the CPA (the UN, U.S.A., Britain, Norway, AU and IGAD) to increase their engagement to reach a solution for lasting peace;

C. ***Extends***support and encouragement to the churches of Sudan in their continued public witness and efforts towards peace and reconciliation in the Sudanese society;

D. ***Appeals*** to WCC member churches and related agencies to, as matter of urgency, provide necessary support to the Sudan Council of Churches and the people of Sudan to contribute to a peaceful process towards free and fair referenda.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to General Salva Kiir Mayardit, president of the Republic of South Sudan, on the day of declaring independence of South Sudan, 7 July 2011**

Your Excellency,

At the threshold of the historic moment when South Sudan will officially become independent on 9th July 2011, on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I take this opportunity to convey our congratulations and profound good wishes to the people of South Sudan who have been struggling for independence over the past several decades. Indeed, it is a matter of great joy that at last the great day has come, the day of independence for which the people of South Sudan have yearned.

As you know, the WCC, our ecumenical partner the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) and both councils' member churches have been accompanying the people of Sudan for much of your long struggle. Forty years ago, the WCC together with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) mediated between the two parties (the ruling party and the SPLA) and reached the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. At this moment of your independence, the WCC is thankful for all those who have negotiated peace and is proud to stand with all those who have supported peace negotiations.

As your country is entering into the first years of independence, we are aware that the new nation will be confronted with the daunting problems of reconciliation between enemies in

conflicts, healing of people traumatized by war, reconstructing a battered infrastructure, restoring its economy, ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law and improving the people's standard of living, especially in the areas of health, education and welfare of the people. While the new Republic of South Sudan will have to face enormous challenges as it seeks to find its place as an independent nation, it is also imperative that the people of South Sudan who struggled for independence should not be denied the historic opportunity to start a new chapter in their nation's history, marked by peace with justice. It is our hope and prayer that the leaders and people of both the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan will make every effort to ensure peace and reconciliation in the new era.

Your Excellency, having been active in accompanying and facilitating the Sudan peace process over the past decades, the World Council of Churches is aware of the fact that the continuing role of the ecumenical movement is to accompany the people of an independent South Sudan in solidarity as they take up the many challenges and tasks of nation-building. It is also our sincere hope that the leaders of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, with the support of the international community, will take immediate steps to resolve the outstanding issues between them and to lay the foundation for two viable states at peace with one another.

Please accept our prayers and very best wishes for the bright and peaceful future of your country and people.

Yours sincerely
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement on the current critical situation of Abyei in South Sudan, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

Following a twenty-year-old civil war between the North and South of Sudan, since July 2011, Sudan and the newly formed South Sudan have undergone a difficult separation. However, disputes concerning the border demarcation and affiliation of the oil-rich area of Abyei have threatened to drag both states back to war.

The Abyei Area is an oil-rich region crisscrossing the borders of Sudan and South Sudan and is seen as a historical bridge between the two countries. This area of Sudan, about the size of Jamaica, is traditionally a territory of the NgokDinka chiefdoms, which the British transferred in 1905 from Bahr-al-Ghazal Province in southern Sudan to Kordofan Province in the North. Initially the struggle associated with this region was about land and pasture claimed by both the NgokDinka and the Misseriya communities. With the onset of the First Sudanese Civil War (1956–1972), these two communities took separate paths, with the Misseriya and the NgokDinka supporting the North and the southern Anyanya rebels, respectively. Most recently this local dispute exacerbated a wider political conflict between two warring groups which subsequently became Sudan and South Sudan. At the national level, however, the struggle has been about natural resources and the area's strategic location in times of war. Since independence, Sudan has been redrawing its borders to gain access to natural resources and to deprive the South of revenue. The discovery of commercial quantities of oil in Abyei has raised the stakes for control and exploitation.

Several attempts have been undertaken to resolve the Abyei conflicts. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) brokered the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement of 1972, which ended the first Sudanese civil war and included a clause that provided for a referendum allowing Abyei to choose to remain in the North or join the autonomous South. This referendum was never held, leading to tensions and incidents of violence and the establishment of a Dinka unit in the Anyanya II rebellion of 1975. The 1995 Asmara Talks agreed to Abyei's determining whether to join the South or stay in Kordofan. In 2004, Abyei was accorded "special administrative status" by the Protocol on the Resolution of the Abyei Conflict (Abyei Protocol) in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the Second Sudanese Civil War. In 2005, boundaries were established by the Abyei Borders Commission in yet another attempt to resolve the longstanding dispute. Disputes and violence that followed establishment of these boundaries led to a boundary revision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague in 2009. This revision has since been endorsed by all parties to the dispute. As was the case in the 1972 Agreement, the CPA provided for a referendum that would allow Abyei to choose to remain in the North or join the autonomous South Sudan, a means of permanently resolving the dispute. Considering that the referendum has never been held, the sentiment of the people of this area that they have been let down seems justified.

The difficulties in holding the Abyei referendum have resulted particularly from the failure to implement fully the 2005 CPA, even though the accord was explicit about the time frame and the process of the referendum. Indeed, the NgokDinka of Abyei felt much more alienated when South Sudan, alongside whom they had fought against the North, declared independence from Sudan in 2011. Frustrated and tired of waiting, the NgokDinka organized and registered voters for their own referendum, held 27 to 29 October 2013. The results showed that 99.9 percent of the voters want to be part of South Sudan. The challenge, however, is that the unilateral NgokDinka poll has no legal weight, especially because both Sudan and South Sudan have said they will not recognize the results. This also means the international community will not recognize the results.

The NgokDinka community has been compelled to countenance a unilateral referendum because all other options have been closed to them. The Abyei city has been destroyed three times in as many decades. The latest destruction took place on 21 May 2012, when Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) seized Abyei city and the National Congress Party of Sudan (NCP) dissolved the Abyei Administration. The conflict that erupted in the following days and weeks led to the killing of more than thirty civilians and displacement of more than 60,000. In June the UN established the Interim Security Force for Abyei (ISFA), composed of 1,400 Ethiopian troops. The assassination of the Paramount Chief of the NgokDinka in June 2013 was carried out in spite of the presence of the UN peace-keeping force. This convinced the NgokDinka that protection by the international community is not guaranteed. As a result, they decided on the unilateral referendum as a last resort.

The Abyei issue, more than any other unresolved conflict, constitutes the most likely source of violence between the Dinka and the Misseriya. Such violence would not be limited to those two communities; it may involve the two sovereign states, South Sudan and Sudan in a war between two nations. Should that happen, then all the democratic, political, and economic gains following the independence of South Sudan would be rolled back, with all the adverse implications for regional security.

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

A. ***Welcomes*** the African Union (AU) statement of 21 October 2013, which expresses the AU's disquiet about Sudan's delay in implementing negotiated agreements and calls on the two countries to resume their discussion on the final status of Abyei;

B. ***Encourages*** the AU to expedite the planned visit of its Peace and Security Council to Abyei to finalize the arrangements for the referendum;

C. ***Urges*** the governments of South Sudan and Sudan, who are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the decision to have the CPA-agreed referendum for Abyei, to ensure that such is implemented without further delay;

D. ***Commends*** South Sudan for acceding to all the provisions in the AU-sponsored Agreement on the Abyei referendum. But without a corresponding assent by Sudan, the implementation is severely hampered; therefore we call on Sudan to accede to the said Agreement, so that the CPA-agreed Abyei referendum may be carried expeditiously;

E. ***Urges*** the International Community, particularly the guarantors of the CPA, to re-engage the issue of Abyei as a matter of moral conscience in ensuring justice for the people of Abyei;

F. ***Urges*** the United Nations, the African Union and the Troika (Norway, UK and U.S.) to do what is right for the people of Abyei: to urge the Government of Sudan to implement the process for the referendum; and

G. ***Recommends*** the churches and the international ecumenical community to re-engage the process for Abyei referendum and to give it the necessary moral and material support.

- ## Letter from WCC general secretary to President Salva Kiir Mayardit, expressing profound concern for the people of the nation, 16 December 2013

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to you to express our deep concern regarding the sudden eruption of violence in South Sudan this past night. It is with great shock that we heard the news of the attempted coup d'état in Juba that plunged innocent citizens in terror and fear of new conflicts.

We condemn and deplore such acts of violence, particularly for a young nation like South Sudan which is finally free from conflicts after many decades of hostilities and violence. This is by no means the time to reinitiate conflicts again. South Sudan should pursue peace and justice by all means and in all times, in collaboration with all parties concerned, and become a model for other nations in Africa and elsewhere.

We ask all parties to respect this advent season of Christmas which is important for South Sudanese, and urge you to give a chance for dialogue and restraint, forgiveness, as well as for

peaceful political solutions to end this conflict, even in such difficult times when tensions are exacerbated.

The World Council of Churches also encourages churches to continue being a sanctuary and an accompanying presence for all those who are fleeing away from the violence, and are looking for safe shelters. We pray with you as you provide care to those innocent civilians wounded during the violence, including children.

This is a time to pursue peace. Inspired by the late Nelson Mandela, whom we both honoured when we met in Johannesburg last week we know that it is possible to live together in a multi-cultural society. The people of South Sudan have suffered for several decades, and are now longing for peace and justice. We pray that the situation will quickly normalize and that peace will prevail again soon. As Your Excellency said when we met in Juba in April 2013; “after the independence of South Sudan, it is the churches that have the capability to bring people together and help rebuild the country.”

The ecumenical community is committed to continue accompanying the people of South Sudan in their struggle for justice and peace.

Yours in Christ's love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **WCC calls for a “Mandela moment” in South Sudan, 17 December 2013**

The newly elected moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee has called on the government of South Sudan to have a “Mandela moment” as it confronts the aftermath of violence on Monday.

Speaking from Geneva where she was at the WCC headquarters for weekend meetings and to attend a Monday morning Mandela memorial, Dr Agnes Abuom, a Kenyan, said “this is really a Mandela moment” for South Sudan.

“Just when we have laid Mandela to rest and we are celebrating his life of forgiveness and reconciliation, of justice, of freedom, of the capacity to be content and to be inclusive: this is really a lesson for South Sudan”, she said.

WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit has sent a letter to South Sudanese president SalvaKiirMayardit, expressing profound concern for the people of the nation. He wrote in part, “The people of South Sudan have suffered for several decades and are now longing for peace and justice. We pray that the situation will quickly normalize and that peace will prevail again soon.”

According to news reports, South Sudan’s President SalvaKiir announced Monday that an attempted coup by soldiers loyal to his former deputy, RiekMachar, had been quashed. Machar and others involved have apparently fled to the UN Mission in the capital Juba.

Abuom stressed concern for the churches in South Sudan which through the Sudan Council of Churches and the WCC were deeply involved in reaching a peace agreement between Sudan

and South Sudan, and in helping to facilitate the formation of South Sudan as the youngest nation in the world.

She said the churches there have already responded and called for calm. She added that South Sudan, as a young nation, "needs a lot of latitude for different voices given its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious composition."

"It is unfortunate that there has been an attempted coup, and we would want to say to those people that there is no space again in Africa for armed rebellion," she said. "We believe in dialogue, in the power of the vote and election to change leadership peacefully and to transit from one leadership to another."

Echoing Abuom's comments, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit also called on the government of South Sudan to reach out to all within the country in a way that reflects the highest ideals of Mandela.

"Mandela has helped us see the worst and best in humanity," Tveit said, restating his comments from the Mandela memorial held at the Ecumenical Centre Monday, 16 December. "He helped us to be realistic; even more important, he helped us believe in the one humanity and to love that one humanity."

Tveit met with Kiir in April 2013, when Kiir said "After the independence of South Sudan, it is the churches that have the capability to bring people together and help rebuild the country."

"South Sudan is a state where all religious communities, including Christians, can work freely, and their contributions for the social betterment, regardless of their religious associations, are welcomed," Kiir told Tveit.

"South Sudan needs now, and it is called, to develop a culture of democracy that supports different opinions even when they are not congruent with what the leadership expects, because that is a democracy," Abuom said.

Sudan

- **WCC and the World Evangelical Alliance speak with a common voice on the January 2011 referendum in Sudan, November 11, 2010**

The leaders of the World Council of Churches and World Evangelical Alliance came together recently to say their organizations and member churches are speaking with a common voice when it comes to the January 2011 referendum in Sudan.

They said the referendum, which will be held 9 January 2011 and determines whether Southern Sudan remains part of Sudan or not, should be held on the date promised, be free and fair, and the results accepted by all parties.

The referendum is being viewed as a critical point in Sudanese history and is the promised outcome of a 2005 Naivasha Agreement between the Khartoum central government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army or Movement after years of war.

In a joint interview last week, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Rev. Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe, CEO and secretary general of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), said it was time to call on religious and political leaders in Africa and around the world to assure a free and fair referendum and for all to abide by the results.

They also stressed the importance of supporting the Sudanese people in southern Sudan as they make their decision on the future of south Sudan.

Tveit spoke of a recent meeting with Muslim and Christian leaders and scholars who said the election cannot be viewed as a point of tension between Muslim and Christian. Tunnicliffe said the WEA is calling for a day of prayer for Sudan on 5 December.

Both leaders pointed out that there are hundreds of thousands of Christians living in northern Sudan who could be impacted by the outcome of the referendum. But there are also million others, both Christian and Muslim, who remain internally displaced from the war and others living in volatile and disputed areas of the country that could be impacted if the referendum is delayed or the results not accepted.

"We have come to a point where we need to say the people of the Sudan have suffered enough and the people of Sudan must have the right through democratic processes to define and decide their own future," Tveit said in the interview.

"And the people of Sudan should not now be the battlefield between religious actors or political actors in that region of the world," he added.

"We have both been there and we've listened to the church leaders, and to underscore the fact that for 50 years Sudan has suffered greatly, we believe that the people of Sudan need a better way," Tunnicliffe said.

"The reality is that 5 years ago when the peace agreement was finally signed and the agreement for the referendum was agreed upon as mechanism for the peace accord, we are saying we fully support and get behind the need for the referendum to take place," Tunnicliffe added.

While the two organizations will not be issuing a joint statement on Sudan, they believe the need for speaking with a common voice is a vital step in bringing the situation of Sudan to the attention of the world as well as their own churches. Both recently issued separate but similar statements on Sudan.

Between them the WCC and WEA represent the vast majority of the world's Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Evangelical churches with a combined constituency in the hundreds of millions people if not close to a billion people around the globe.

The WCC has 349 member churches representing some 550 million Christians. The WEA is a network of 129 churches worldwide represents some 600 million evangelical Christians. Some WEA churches are also members of the WCC.

Both leaders are concerned that while the situation in Sudan is on the radar screen of most political leaders, they want to remind them of their obligations to keep the referendum on track. Without this "we are going to face an ongoing huge problem with conflict, not just in Sudan, but in the region," Tunnicliffe said.

At the same time they want to engage not only churches but Muslim leaders in making certain the referendum is successful, no matter the outcome.

During a recent Muslim-Christian consultation held at the WCC headquarters in Geneva (1-4 November) and sponsored by the WCC, the World Islamic Call Society and the Consortium of A Common Word, some 60 Christian and Muslim leaders and scholars referenced Sudan as part of their final conference statement saying, "It is important that these tensions not be seen as being between Muslims and Christians."

"For average Christians in our community they know very little about Sudan so how do we make sure we get that message out there so we can be praying and supporting what's taking place there," Tunnicliffe said recognizing the challenge for the WEA with its constituency.

To that end, WEA is calling "for a global day of prayer on 5 December where we will provide prayer resources," Tunnicliffe said. "On that Sunday churches around the world can pray for the upcoming referendum and the people of Sudan."

"I hope this is a time when we can unite in this prayer and I commend that the WEA has made this effort to prepare these prayers and can only recommend that this will happen with the member churches of the WCC as well," Tveit said.

Both organizations have been involved in Sudan for decades. The Sudan Council of Churches has recently invited WEA to place monitors on the ground during the referendum, according to Tunnicliffe. The WEA has also worked in Sudan through relief and development activities.

The WCC continues to work with the Sudan Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Sudan Ecumenical Forum. Former WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, has been as a special ecumenical envoy for Sudan working with former South African president Thabo Mbeki who is special envoy for Sudan with the African Union, and also with American diplomats based in Khartoum, all in an effort to make certain the referendum remains on time and is free and fair.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC member churches regarding the January 2011 referenda in South Sudan and in the Diaspora, 17 December 2010**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you may be aware, the people of the semi-autonomous South Sudan are currently going through an historic referendum concerning the future status of Southern Sudan and Abyei, scheduled to take place on 9 January 2011. During this process, apprehension is growing among Sudanese citizens both in the North and South in the run-up to the referendum that could lead to unprecedented risks unless carefully handled.

The World Council of Churches has been accompanying its ecumenical partner, the Sudan Council of churches (SCC) for the past several years. It was in this role that the WCC mediated the two parties (the ruling party and the SPLA) in the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. Currently WCC continues to accompany the SCC along with the Sudan Ecumenical Forum (SEF) in its important role of promoting a peaceful settlement of the ongoing referendum process. It is our hope and prayer that the referendum process takes place peacefully on 9 January 2011 as agreed in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 which was signed by both parties.

In view of this reality, I would like to ask the WCC member churches around the world and particularly those member churches where the Southern Sudanese living in diaspora are entitled to vote, to cooperate in observing, monitoring and praying for all the Sudanese during this challenging time in the history of the country.

The countries where the Southern Sudanese living in diaspora are entitled to vote include: Australia, Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. I would be grateful for the cooperation of all our member churches in these respective countries.

In addition, I would like to inform you that the WCC, jointly with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), is sending delegations to observe and monitor the voting process in South Sudan and in some of the neighboring countries where diaspora voting is taking place.

Your assistance and prayers are most deeply appreciated. I wish you a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Statement by WCC's general secretary on the situation of escalating violence against civilians in Sudan's disputed South Kordofan State, 10 June 2011**

Current violence in Sudan threatens independent South Sudan
Escalating violence against civilians in Sudan's disputed South Kordofan State is leading to major humanitarian catastrophe with an estimated 300,000 people besieged, cut off from

relief aid, and unable to escape fighting, according to a number of aid agencies and witnesses in the region.

Up to 40,000 people have fled recent fighting between Sudanese government troops and members of the former southern rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), in Kadugli, the capital of Sudan's oil-producing state of South Kordofan, the United Nations has said.

"The violence and displacement of people now taking place is a potential threat to the peaceful transition and independence of South Sudan," WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit said Friday. "We call on those involved to end the violence immediately and for those countries involved in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement which led to the January referendum to place pressure on both sides to resolve this situation."

In the 9 January referendum nearly 99 percent of voters in southern Sudan – which is predominantly Christian and Animist – chose to secede from the rest of Sudan. In doing so, they created the world's newest nation which on 9 July will formally declare and celebrate their independence. The remainder of Sudan has a Muslim majority and leadership.

"The people of Sudan as well as the churches in Sudan have committed too much of their lives in the past decades to work for peace to see the region slip into violence again," Tveit said. "The ecumenical community worldwide calls upon the participants to now move forward into a future of peace for all. The will and desire of the people of Sudan is for peace and justice and we must all help to make this dream a reality."

The United States, China, African Union, European Union and Arab League all played a crucial role in brokering the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and their involvement, along with civil society efforts that include the Sudan Council of Churches and the Sudan Ecumenical Forum (SEF), led to the peaceful referendum process.

Longstanding ecumenical engagement

Since 1994, the Sudan Ecumenical Forum, which has been supported by the WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), has played a major role in raising awareness in the international arena about conflicts in Sudan, with the voice of the Sudanese churches at the centre.

The Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, co-chair of the SEF, said on Friday that urgent action is needed. "A humanitarian crisis on an enormous scale is unfolding in South Kordofan State. We appeal to world leaders and governments to pay attention to this situation and urgently protect people."

Former South African president Thabo Mbeki met on Thursday with Sudanese president Omar Hassan al-Bashir in Khartoum. Mbeki was scheduled to fly to Juba today, Friday, to confer with southern leaders.

Already, SEF has received reports by independent witnesses claiming violence and atrocities against civilians. Witnesses report seeing people perceived to be SPLA sympathizers dragged out of the United Nations Missions in Sudan (UNMIS) compound in Kadugli and executed in front of UNMIS personnel who did not intervene.

These claims from witnesses have been backed up by evidence of churches in the region which have contacted SEF pleading for urgent assistance and to bring the killings to the world's attention. According to a report from the Reuters news agency on Friday, the south is bracing for aerial bombardment.

In addition to killings, looting, burning of property and tens of thousands of people on the run, the violence is a serious threat to stability between northern and southern Sudan and could affect the whole region, Hitzler says.

The Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) is also calling on the humanitarian community and the UN mission to rescue survivors and on the international community to prevent a return to war in Sudan. For the last five days, survivors have locked themselves into their homes, without food or water, for fear of being killed.

Others have fled to the mountains where they are being pursued by helicopter gunships, the SCC says.

- **Joint statement by WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches regarding the increasing incidents of attacks on Christians and destruction of church property in Sudan, 24 April 2012**

We express grave concern over the increasing incidents of attacks on Christians and destruction of church property in Sudan. We condemn the destruction on 21st April of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church Bible School and burning of its books including Bibles. It is worrying to note that the incident, which took place in Gerief West in Khartoum, happened while policemen stood by but did nothing. We have also learned with disbelief that on Monday 23rd April security forces took over the premises of the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) and Sudan Aid in Nyala, Darfur. We call for the immediate withdrawal of security officials from the SCC office and for the release of the vehicles and bikes that the security forces confiscated.

We regret to note that, despite the rhetoric about freedom of religion and protection of minorities by the government of Sudan, threats and discrimination against Christians in Khartoum and its environs are increasing with time. Mobs like the one that burned down the Bible School are marauding in parts of Khartoum and causing mayhem with impunity. They seem to have been encouraged by the inflammatory speeches of government leaders in Khartoum.

We salute the courage of Christians who gathered in the compound of the Presbyterian Evangelical Church on 22nd April to encourage one another; and we welcome the solidarity expressed by Muslims, women's groups, and some politicians who joined the gathering.

We call on the Government of the Republic of Sudan to move with speed and apprehend those responsible for attacking Christians and burning down church property, and bring them to book. Unless and until such actions are dealt with decisively and early enough, true security and the protection of Christians in Sudan will be greatly compromised.

We call on the international community to put pressure on the government of Sudan to respect the freedom of religion and protect Christians and all other religious minorities in Sudan.

We call on Christians around the world to pray for their fellow Christians in Sudan who are going through very difficult times and are not able to practice their faith in freedom.

For: World Council of Churches
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

For: All Africa Conference of Churches
Rev. Dr André Karamaga
AACC general secretary

- **Joint statement by WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches following the demolition of an Episcopal parish church in Khartoum on orders of Sudanese government authorities, 22 June 2012**

The All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches strongly condemn the demolition of the Episcopal Parish Church of Saint John, Haj Yousif in the Diocese of Khartoum by the Government Authorities in Khartoum at 11.00 AM on Monday 18th June 2012. We are saddened that this has happened within two months after the occupation and confiscation of property of the Sudan Council of Churches and Sudan Aid premises in Nyala, Darfur, by security forces on 23rd April 2012. We also recall that the Sudan Evangelical Church Bible School was destroyed and books including the Holy Bible, burned on the 21st April 2012 in the full view of the police, in Gerief West in Khartoum. We are further reminded that, the government of Khartoum had, for the first time in the country's history, denied its citizens the Christmas holiday in December 2011.

We express our fears that all these events may not be isolated but rather calculated attacks on Sudanese civilians who are not of the Muslim faith and their property in Khartoum, and in particular Christians. This is more the case considering that church leaders from the demolished Saint John, Haj Yousif, had for 25 years been pleading with government authorities to issue the church with legal recognition just as the rest of the allocations in the area. Further, it is now public knowledge that Christians of Muslim background have also been targeted and have been dispossessed of their properties and their spouses.

We once again regret that despite repeated rhetoric about freedom of religion and the protection of the minorities in the Republic of Sudan, the government policy seems to be bent on threatening and discriminating against Christians in Khartoum. By protecting religious fundamentalists who wreck mayhem and havoc on innocent civilians with impunity, the Republic of Sudan undermines the tenets on which a multi-religious society is based.

The ecumenical movement cannot remain silent while such a horrific violation of human rights and threat to lives continues unabated. Indeed, as the church, we are called to promote and assure abundant life, a possibility that seems to be fading for many Christians in Sudan.

We call upon all Christians in the Republic of Sudan to remain peaceful and encourage one another. We also wish to call upon our Muslim brothers and sisters in Khartoum to show solidarity with their fellow country-men and -women of the Christian faith. We believe peaceful life together between Christians and Muslims is essential for a promising future of Sudan.

We call upon the Government of the Republic of Sudan to fully investigate the motive of these repeated incidents and apprehend those responsible for these criminal acts, and to provide adequate and true security to Christians in Sudan.

We call upon the international community to exert renewed pressure on the government of Sudan to observe in full the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, including the freedom of religion and freedom of assembly and the protection of Christians and all other religious minorities in Sudan.

We call upon all believers around the world, and especially Christians, to pray for their brothers and sisters in Sudan in these difficult times when they are not able to freely practice their faith as they should.

We salute the courage of the church leaders in Sudan and welcome their plan to organize prayers on Sunday, 24th June on the site of the demolition, the Episcopal Parish Church of St John, Khartoum. We call upon Christians around the world to express their support and solidarity with Christians in Sudan by joining them in prayer on that Sunday,

For: World Council of Churches
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

For: All Africa Conference of Churches
Rev. Dr André Karamaga
AACC general secretary

Uganda

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to The Most Rev. Henry Luke Orombi, CEO of the Church of the Province of Uganda regarding terrorist attacks against innocent civilians in Kampala, 19 July 2010**

Dear Archbishop,

We have been deeply saddened by the news of the terrorist attacks on innocent civilians in Kampala early last week, which killed more than 70 people and injured many. On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I would like to express our condolences to the bereaved families and sympathy to all victims. As you know, the WCC strongly condemns such wanton acts of terrorism and violence targeting innocent human lives. We believe that these kinds of attacks in any society will only intensify fear, hatred and polarization in society. The attacks against innocent people are a sin against God who offers life as a divine gift.

By expressing our strong condemnation of this act of terrorism, we hold all citizens of Uganda in our thoughts and prayers as the people of Uganda pass through a critical time in its history.

As people of faith who believe in the dignity and fullness of life of every human being, we are committed to join hands with you to build communities of peace and reconciliation. May God

almighty heal the deep wounds, protect all God's children and help them to overcome hatred, intolerance and violence.

Yours in Christ's love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

cc. Uganda Joint Christian Council, Kampala

Asia-Pacific

- **Call by Asian church leaders at consultation on "Peace and security in Asia: ecumenical response" for deeper involvement and ecumenical advocacy actions, Bangkok, Thailand, 2-6 August 2011**

Serious issues that threaten Asia's peace and security have been recognized by an ecumenical consultation that was organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia. The event was held in Bangkok, Thailand from 2 to 6 August.

The ecumenical consultation with 35 participants from 20 Asian countries addressed the theme "Peace and security in Asia: ecumenical response". It analyzed the emerging geopolitical trends and peace and security concerns.

The group concluded that, although many Asian countries claim to be democracies, the paradox is that their images are defiled by frequent cases of illegal detention, torture, custodial deaths, extrajudicial execution and forced disappearances. The common people, particularly minorities and the underprivileged, are made to endure many forms of inhuman and degrading treatment at the hands of armed personnel.

Peace and security concerns set the context for the current interplay of geopolitical trends, especially in regard to the dominant U.S. presence in the socioeconomic and political affairs of Asia, and in the emerging strategic competition between China and the United States as well as, to a lesser extent, between India and China. Other concerns identified were the contesting of boundaries and challenging of sovereignty in the quest for natural resources, the persistence of protracted internal conflicts based on social and ethnic or religious conflicts, and gross human rights violations and lack of democratic governance.

"An increasing trend of religious intolerance and denial of freedom of religion, lack of rule of law and dysfunctional legal systems in several Asian countries are factors identified by several participants as affecting peace and security in Asia, according to Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC.

"As the rulers in several Asian countries foster religious extremism with a view to either acquiring or holding on to political power, politicization of religion is growing, and this undermines the peaceful coexistence of adherents of various religions which has been a long-nurtured tradition and culture in Asia. It is in this context that the Bangkok consultation identified priorities for ecumenical advocacy actions at various levels", Mathews George continued.

The ecumenical consultation also decided that the WCC and the CCA will initiate joint advocacy to address issues relating to these areas: human rights, democratic governance, disarmament; the rights of migrant workers, stateless and internally displaced people; the rights of minorities and freedom of religion, all of which are essential components for ensuring peace and security in Asia.

- ## Communiqué on Asia's human security challenges, 12 June 2013

Seeds of hope for building peace with justice for fullness of life in Asia

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

We, the participants of an international consultation on 'Asia's human security challenges: towards sustainable peace with justice in North East Asia', organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) held in Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong SAR, from 3 to 6 June 2013. We convened under the Lordship of Jesus, who leads us to justice and peace, to understand and analyze various Asian realities, in particular human security challenges and emerging geopolitical trends that affect peace with justice and human rights and human dignity.

During the three days of the deliberations, we celebrated the rich traditions and heritage of this vast Asian continent even as we also lamented the current realities that diminish the dignity of Asian peoples and violate their human rights. Nevertheless, we also share our joy with all peoples of Asia, sharing in their fervent desire for peace, security and justice nurtured in love and undergirded by our commitment to affirm human dignity, protect human rights and build sustainable communities.

We celebrate Asia

1. Asia is a vast region – expansive in land mass; diverse in population, varied in nationalities, ethnicities, and Indigenous Peoples; plural in its religions; varied in its political maturity; rich in economic resources; and vibrant with the multiplicity of cultural expressions. Asia deserves, even requires, a plural rather than a singular description. Asia is rich in natural resources. It has vast fertile and arable lands. Its soil is rich in all of the mineral resources necessary for industrialization and economic development of the region. Asians are hospitable peoples.

2. Asians are nurtured by their ancient civilizations, profound religiosity, and deep spirituality. Asia is home to many religions that have stood the test of time and the challenges posed by secularism, including challenges external and internal to the region. Asia is the birthplace and cradle of all major world religions – the three Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and several other indigenous religions and spiritualities and way of life such as Confucianism.

3. Asian ecumenism has been an incubator of active Christian witness in the public square. Numerous interreligious and interfaith endeavours towards dialogue and cooperation, much of which have been initiated by Christians, and which have sown seeds of social trust and reconciliation, are heartening. Our gathering in Hong Kong hopes to contribute to a long tradition of ecumenical thought and action dealing with sustainable peace with justice, healing and reconciliation, indeed of faithful discipleship and stewardship in the *oikoumene*.

4. Asia hosts a robust civil society. Its numerous people's movements, non-governmental organizations and critical social movements are leveraging citizen and grassroots action in pursuing peace, seeking justice, protecting human rights, building sustainable communities, healing memories of enmities, and reconciling divided peoples and nations.

Asian realities

1. We celebrate Asia even as we also lament historic injustices and their contemporary expressions exacerbated by globalization characterized by the unbridled pursuit of capital, the hegemonic realignment of nation-states by the superpowers and the increased use of violence to protect the unhampered access to the region's wealth and resources. Globalization has engendered development aggression, including extractive mining, to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples and ecological systems, like in Indonesia, India and the Philippines. Asian countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar and Nepal are major migrant-sending countries. South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia receive large numbers of migrant workers. But adequate protection of the right of migrant workers and their families are lamentably lacking. Migrant workers have become easy pawns of the global labour market within migrant-receiving countries in Asia, Arabian Gulf and other parts of the world.

2. Human security in Asia today is threatened and hampered due to various factors. Millions of Asians are denied of peace with justice. Sadly, these are hallmarks of Asian society today: increasing poverty, inadequate health care, economic exploitation, exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation; drug trafficking; armed conflicts and violence; militarization, arms build-up, nuclearization, and proliferation of small arms and light weapons; domination and intervention of major powers from outside and within the region; ethnic and religious conflicts, communal violence, and political unrest; violation and denial of human rights in various forms, like torture, custodial death, human trafficking, extrajudicial killings, and violations on a variety of populations, like the rights of migrant workers, of stateless peoples; of workers and farmers; and the suppression of people's legitimate right to self-determination; lack of rule of law and democratic governance, and more.

3. The intractable wars and lingering conflicts in Asia are either home-grown or fomented and prosecuted by the outside big military and economic powers. These wars and conflicts are pushing the region to conflagration and impoverization. Militarization and escalating arms build-up have become a wider Asian phenomenon. The national coffers of a growing number of Asian countries are too tilted to defence spending rather than to securing social safety nets. A variety of factors explains the new wave of increased military budgets in Asian countries: China's rising influence within the region, the "return to Asia" strategy of the United States, with the so-called Asia pivot, growing territorial and border disputes and related inter-state tensions, and more. Asia region apparently is sliding into an arms race.

4. Peace and security in North East Asia has been a major concern during the past several decades. This certainly is true for the Korean Peninsula where 60 years since an armistice agreement was signed has not eased the tension in the region. The Korean War (1950-1953) cemented the Cold War regime in the region and remains so today. Throughout the war, 5.1 million Korean people have died or wounded and some 10 million people have been separated from their family members. Foreign powers took the lead in this war. The U.S. and former U.S.S.R. had divided the peninsula while Japan laid the foundation for colonial conquest, imperialistic subjugation, and gross human rights violations, including massacres. As superpowers contend for supremacy over the peninsula, and as two different regimes, North Korea and South Korea, ceaselessly confront each other, true peace is ever more elusive. As long as the armistice prevails, there is no true end of the Cold War and world peace that is just, durable and sustainable. This warrants the need for steps to be taken to realize peace include ending of economic, financial and commercial sanctions against North Korea and turning the armistice agreement to a peace treaty, effectively ending today's de facto war.

5. In Asia, the democratic space is disturbingly shrinking and the rule of law and good governance grossly deficient. In the name of national security, legitimate dissent and protest is suppressed, including those raised by minorities, Indigenous Peoples, non-governmental organizations, even opposition political parties, thus shrinking political diversity. The de-legitimization of established democratic institutions, including independent judiciaries, and the discrediting, imprisonment and killing of democratic elements and forces, including civil society, NGO leaders and church workers, defies a region with many countries that have already subscribed to many multilateral human rights and good governance mechanisms. Gross violation of human rights, especially freedom of religion or belief, has led to ethno-religious cleansing and heightened religious intolerance. We must challenge the exploitation of the fight against terrorism as reason for suppression of freedoms and civil liberties.

6. In Asia, nation-states have aggressively asserted their roles while the participation of citizens and civil society organizations in the political process is increasingly being diminished. Recognizable deficit in democratic constitutional practices and regnant features of authoritarian politics in the region are frustrating democratization efforts. Increased military alliances and free trade agreements with the superpowers is putting Asian countries in the ambit of superpower military and economic strategies that do not necessarily promote the region's interest but rather pulls us into their wars and agendas.

7. Peace negotiations and reconciliation efforts in different forms and stages are taking place in countries like the Philippine, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal etc. Many of these peace processes have taken long time to materialize. Previously consolidated arrangements are frustrated by exigent and narrow political interests often at the behest of and imposition of external interventions rather than durable considerations or community interests.

8. Even as Asia has rich resources, economic disparities and poverty abound. In the face of wanton poverty, the region faces lack of food security. The products of globalized production have enriched global coffers but not local communities. Defence budgets have taken a big slice of national budgets while appropriations for social safety nets, especially education and health, remain terribly low. The ratio of borrowing and servicing of burgeoning foreign debt to that of national spending is consigning domestic need to low priority. Add the unprecedented culture of corruption denies the poor of legitimate public resources and finances.

9. Natural disasters and human made calamities have been features of many Asian countries, like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, China, Japan, and the Philippines. Inadequate mitigating mechanisms make Asian countries even more vulnerable to these disasters. Development aggression, including extractive mining, has added to historic carbon emission by Asian countries, especially China, Japan, India and South Korea, putting climate change an urgent concern.

10. Religious fundamentalism and political extremism is on the rise in Asia. In clear instances, religious differences have been exploited to intensify conflicts and violence. Politicization of religion and persecution of religious minorities, especially curtailing the freedom of religion is another prevalent trend in several Asian countries.

11. The patriarchal structures of Asian societies are contributing to hierarchal practices that exacerbate abuse and violence and must therefore be critiqued so that we can forge liberating relationships. The abuse of, trafficking in and violence against women, children and youth

must be stopped. Complicity of Christians in acts of injustice and violence, and their reluctance to stop them, fragmenting the body of Christ, confuses neighbours of other faiths about our sincerity to live out the fullness of shalom. Our lament must be turned to affirmation of every effort and endeavour by all religions and ideologies to work tirelessly and sacrificially to make a more just and compassionate world and a friendlier, brighter tomorrow.

We hope for Asia

1. Christ is our peace; Christ leads us to overcome injustice (Ephesians 2). Our commitment to peace and justice are a humble response to the ethical demands of shalom and not by political exigency or economic expediency. The peace that we seek is the peace that the Psalmist exclaimed as having embraced with justice (Psalm 85). We must be warned that God is displeased with the absence of justice and would be appalled if there was no one in the public square to take the side of the poor, deprived, oppressed and marginalized (Isaiah 59).

2. Christians desiring for peace and justice must be servants of peace and agents of justice rather than peddlers of death. We must triumph over militarism and militarization and move from militarized economies to peace economies. We must not be seduced by the military industrial complex to militarize our societies and pillage our rich natural resources. Christ has already triumphed over the imperial order and we are now a resurrected people in Christ, invited to be Christ's friends, and friends of God's beloved whose hurts and pains Jesus took upon himself – the widows and orphans, the despised and destitute, the oppressed and downtrodden.

3. The diversity of our ethnicities and nationalities is a celebration of God's image in each of us, compelling us to protect human dignity and assert human rights in faithfulness to our God. Our involvement in human rights must redound to lifting up the poor, deprived, oppressed and marginalized. God's justice is about the victims, the helpless and the hurt. Touching their lives – in solidarity and accompaniment – is the true measure of Christian discipleship. Ensuring the fullness of life together and collectively with them is the true mark of Christian stewardship.

4. The peace of Christ embodies abundant and life in its fullness here and now (John 10:10). Abundance and prosperity must be predicated on lifestyles and political and corporate practices that sustain the integrity of God's entire creation, which is cosmological in scope as *oikoumene* is truly about. Pillage and plunder has no place in the order of God's creation. The health of the ecological order is at the heart of God's creative design. This includes food and water security for all. In the abundance of God's resources and grace, we are called in Asia to live simple lifestyles of contentment and sharing which announces our liberation from mammon.

True national security is peoples' security that puts first and centres the human rights and freedoms of human beings and their collectivities. It is security that makes us and our neighbours live together in peace with justice and fullness of life. It is security that makes possible for everyone to "sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one will make them afraid" (Micah 4:4). Might it be Lord Jesus that we merit your blessings to be your true partners in sowing hope, spreading love, building justice and seeking peace for life, so that the world might yet believe. God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

Afghanistan

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the secretary general of the United Nations, on the killing of eight staff members of the United Nations Operation Centre in northern Afghanistan, 5 April 2011**

Your Excellency,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the killing of eight staff members of the United Nations Operation Centre in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif during a protest over the burning of a copy of the holy Koran by a U.S. pastor in Florida. Your Excellency, I take this opportunity to extend our heart-felt condolences to you, all the staff and the families of your colleagues who were killed in the attack.

I understand that the victims of this attack had devoted their time and life to a mission of helping the Afghan people who are suffering in the midst of severe economic hardships and insecurity.

In targeting the UN Staff, the perpetrators have exhibited an abysmal disregard for the commitment of the UN and the international community, especially their efforts to help the people of Afghanistan. We condemn this senseless act of violence carried out against innocent workers of the UN ensuring a long lasting peace in Afghanistan. It is in every aspect unjustifiable and those responsible for this attack must be held accountable.

I would also like to take this opportunity to let you know that the entire membership of the World Council of Churches (WCC) firmly rejects the actions of burning the holy Koran or any holy book and we feel deeply grieved by this reprehensible action conducted by a small group of people who manipulate others in the name of Christianity.

The WCC is working at various levels to promote Just Peace, interreligious dialogue and harmony and stresses the importance of peace for all and urges all sides to reject violence and provocation.

On behalf of the WCC once again I offer our sincere condolences and offer our prayers.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Aotearoa-New Zealand

- **Pastoral letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Aotearoa-New Zealand following the devastating earthquake of February 2011, 23 February 2011**

To : Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I nga Hahi o Aotearoa (Maori Council of Churches) and the World Council of Churches member churches of Aotearoa New Zealand

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Grace, peace and the gift of healing be with you through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

I write to you from the 2011 central committee meeting of the World Council of Churches. Christians from many traditions and all regions of the globe are gathered here in Geneva, and we are praying for the nation and people of Aotearoa New Zealand. We join in prayer for you, for your church and all churches, for your ministries and for the service you are undertaking. In the aftermath of earthquake and related calamities, concern for you occupies our hearts, minds and spirits.

We are praying for your people: for those who are suffering, for those who mourn, for those who are disoriented by the horror of events, for those whose faith is threatened. We remember the dead and dying, even as we pray that all may find comfort as sure as our hope in the promise of resurrection to eternal life.

May you find strength to join again in the great proclamation of Psalm 46:1-3.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

We in the World Council of Churches and partner ecumenical organizations are eager for word of what we may do to be of practical aid as Aortearoa New Zealand deals with this tragedy, continues its recovery and begins to rebuild.

Please do not hesitate to be in contact with me, and to let us know how we may help.

In Christian love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Australia

- **Statement of the "Living letters" ecumenical solidarity team visit to the Indigenous Peoples of the Northern Territory of Australia, 12-17 September 2010**

At the invitation of the National Council of Churches of Australia (NCCA) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) to the World Council of Churches (WCC) a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians have come as a Living Letter to the Aboriginal Peoples of the Northern Territory in Australia.

We come from around the world; from Bolivia, Egypt, the United States of America, The Philippines, Indonesia, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia and bring with us our own stories and experiences as Indigenous and marginalised peoples. We have come to hear the voices of Aboriginal Peoples and to bear witness to the injustices they face on a daily basis.

We thank our Aboriginal brothers and sisters for the very warm welcome we have received everywhere we have travelled. We have visited communities and peoples in Darwin, Galiwink'u, Mapuru, Wadeye, Hermannsburg, Amoonguna, Mount Nancy Town Camp, the Anglican Northern Territory future leaders and the students of Nungalinya College. We deeply appreciate the generosity people have shown us by inviting us into their homes and lives. Our only regret is that time and distance did not allow us to visit more communities.

We have gained valuable insights and have been profoundly moved by what we have heard. We are concerned to observe the discrimination, oppression and racism that Aboriginal Peoples experience on a daily basis. We are dismayed by the lack of consultation and negotiation from governments of all levels as they make and implement policies and programs that have significant impacts on Aboriginal Peoples.

Many of us are shocked because we did not realize this is still happening in Australia. We have had insight into the "other" Australia. The one that is hidden away and not talked about honestly. Our shock was compounded by the fact that Australia is quick to condemn human rights abuses in other countries, and yet perpetuates them in its own backyard.

We too say "enough is enough!" As Christians, we affirm that respect of the whole human person is important. We have heard of the injustices being perpetrated against Northern Territory communities and believe that they are not just against the Aboriginal Peoples of these places but they are being perpetrated against humanity and against the will of God.

The things we have heard about and seen this week remind us that colonization is not something that happened two hundred years ago, it is ongoing. As Indigenous and marginalized peoples from other lands, we feel a connection to the struggle of the Aboriginal Peoples. We too experience colonization and systemic racism in our own contexts.

We have heard about the Northern Territory Emergency Response, also known as the Intervention which was initiated by the Howard Government ostensibly to address child abuse.

We have heard the Intervention has taken control of the lives of Aboriginal Peoples through such measures as compulsory income management and compulsory acquisition of leases over Aboriginal land.

We have heard that it was necessary to suspend aspects of the Racial Discrimination Act in order to implement these measures.

We have heard of the people's confusion and despair at these extreme measures and their hope for change with the change of Government in 2007. Despite this hope, the Labor government has continued the Intervention which remains a blight on Australia's reputation.

We challenge these unjust and racist structures and systems and question the Australian lawmakers about how they conduct their business just as Jesus questioned the Pharisees and lawmakers of his time.

The Intervention has been a failure because the government has not listened to Aboriginal voices and has not negotiated or properly consulted about any aspect of these policies. The Government used armed forces to implement the Intervention. People continue to be forced from their homelands and outstations. People are being treated like criminals without just cause.

The government and the media continue to paint a picture of Aboriginal dysfunction and yet refuse to look in the mirror at the devastating effect that their own cultural practices have on Aboriginal communities.

We say to the current government you have had three years to "reset the relationship with Aboriginal Peoples", yet you have failed to do so. In fact we have heard in every place we visited that life has not improved under the Intervention, it has in fact deteriorated. We have heard of despair, anguish and confusion throughout the Intervention years and the dismantling of communities.

We have also heard and seen the strength of resistance. "The oldest living, surviving culture in all the world" has not been crushed. The will of the people to stand up for their rights has heartened us and inspired us to action. We feel a great responsibility to ensure that the time and stories that was generously shared with us will produce positive outcomes and that their voices will not go unheeded.

To our Indigenous brothers and sisters we say; "You do not stand alone". We will endeavour to support and encourage your resistance against injustice. We affirm your right to self-determination. We affirm your right to live in your own traditional lands and we affirm your right to maintain and enrich your cultures and ensure your traditions are strengthened and passed on for generations to come. We encourage you to continue to draw on the strength of your cultures to resist the debilitating effects of the ways of the colonisers.

We stand in solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, but more than that we commit to speak out and tell the world what we have seen and heard. We strongly encourage the Churches in Australia and the World Council of Churches to commit themselves to take action to support your political rights, your human rights and your rights as Australian citizens. Our first action will be to produce a report which will detail our observations, concerns and recommendations arising from this visit and through our actions we will show that this Living Letter visit is not a "breeze blowing in the wind." To our Indigenous brothers and sisters we say "Your fight is our fight."

The Living Letters team is composed of:

- Ms Hera Rere Clarke, WCC central committee member, New Zealand, Anglican
- Ms Renée Grounds, United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race, United States
- Dr Hanna Grace, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox
- Rev. Dr Mindawati Perangin-Angin, WCC central committee member, Indonesia, Karo Batak Protestant Church
- Fr Rex Reyes, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Episcopal

- Rev. Dr Anthony Dancer, Social Justice Commission of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia
- Ms Georgia Corowa, coordinator, Queensland Churches Together Indigenous People's Partnership
- Rev. Sealin Garlett, deputy chair of the NATSIEC Commission, Uniting Church in Australia

WCC and NATSIEC-NCCA staff:
- Mr Graeme Mundine, NATSIEC-NCCA
- Ms Gabrielle Russel-Mundine, NATSIEC-NCCA
- Ms Maria Chavez Quispe, WCC, Indigenous Peoples Programme

- **Statement on the situation of Indigenous Peoples of Australia adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16–22 February 2011**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the Indigenous Peoples and traditional custodians of the land now known as Australia. They are diverse peoples with some 250 language groups and nations and are known as having the oldest living cultures in the world. However, their way of life, identity and wellbeing is under threat from the ongoing effects of colonization and attempts to assimilate them into non-Indigenous "Western" ways.

In light of these concerns, particularly those expressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the churches in Australia, the World Council of Churches (WCC) sent a "Living Letters" team to Australia in September 2010. The team visited several Aboriginal communities and heard stories and experiences of the "Intervention". The "Living Letters" team expressed concern about the discrimination, oppression and racism they observed and which Aboriginal People experience on a daily basis. They also expressed dismay at the lack of consultation and negotiation by governments at all levels.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are over represented in all areas of disadvantage. In many communities there are people living in extreme poverty without appropriate access to health services, education, employment, and housing. In some communities the effects of dispossession, forced removals from families, inter-generational trauma, racism and poverty manifest as social issues such as alcohol and drug addictions, violence and social breakdown.

While the situation is dire for many in all parts of Australia, in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia there are particular challenges for many living in Aboriginal communities. For example, the life expectancy gap for all Indigenous Australians is less than for non-Indigenous Australians, but the gap in the Northern Territory is one of the highest at 14 years. Infant mortality rates are up to four times higher than for the non-Indigenous population. In many NT communities there is a lack of access to health care, housing, clean water, electricity, and education. The more remote the community the worse the situation gets.

In 2007, the Australian **g**overnment introduced the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) which came to be known as the "Intervention". This was introduced in response to a report on Aboriginal child sexual abuse called Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little children are sacred". The report made 97 recommendations to address the Aboriginal child

sexual abuse highlighted in the report. Although this report was commissioned by the local NT government, the Australian government did not wait for their response. Rather, it claimed that this report identified a "national emergency" that required an immediate "Intervention" and announced a wide range of policies which were to be implemented in "prescribed areas", all of which were Aboriginal communities in the NT.

The "Intervention" measures were broad in nature and addressed welfare reform and employment; law and order; education; family and child support; child and family health; housing; land tenure; and governance and management of the "Intervention".

While there was no dispute that the NT needed a significant influx of resources and programmes, and it was acknowledged that there had been many years of neglect by government, there were many concerning aspects of the "Intervention". These concerns included the lack of consultation; the compulsory acquisition of five year leases over Aboriginal owned and operated land; compulsory alcohol and pornography bans; the cessation of an employment scheme called the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP); compulsory health checks for all children; and promises of increased resources for health and education. Also introduced was compulsory income quarantining. This meant that anybody in a prescribed area who was on a welfare payment was given a card to access their money, but they were only allowed to spend this half of their income on food, clothes and other essential items, in certain shops. This applied to all Aboriginal people on welfare whether they were parents or carers of children or not and whether they had problems managing their money and providing for their families or not. Notably the "Intervention" legislation did not address one single recommendation that came out of the Little Children are Sacred Report.

Additionally, many aspects of the "Intervention" were discriminatory and the government found it necessary to suspend aspects of the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) in order to pass the necessary legislation to implement the "Intervention". This meant that nobody had any redress to complain about the discriminatory aspects of it.

The "Intervention" policies brought much shame to Aboriginal Peoples. The nature of the policies and much of the discussion at the time implied that they were the cause of their own disadvantage. At a practical level the "Intervention" had a severe impact on day to day life. For example, people were not able to spend their money how they wanted and felt shame at having storekeepers telling them they were not able to buy some items. They also felt embarrassed that much of the discourse implied all Aboriginal Peoples were alcoholics and paedophiles. In fact, one of the first actions the federal government took was to place a sign at the entrance to every Aboriginal community prohibiting alcohol and pornography in those communities. The government used claims of a paedophilia ring in the Northern Territory to justify the "Intervention", but did not include a sufficient amount of consultation and negotiation with the Aboriginal community in the investigation of these allegations and resolution of the situation.

Many human rights advocates, church groups and communities themselves have spoken out against the "Intervention" but not all the criticism has been domestic. Australia has come under international scrutiny of the situation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Professor James Anaya, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples visited the Northern Territory and expressed concern about the discriminatory nature of many

of the aspects of the intervention and the contravention of many international human rights standards to which Australia is a signatory.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has also commented on the "Intervention" and said: "The Committee regrets the discriminatory impact this intervention has had on affected communities including restrictions on Aboriginal rights to land, property, social security, adequate standards of living, cultural development, work, and remedies."

The "Living Letters" team reported that in every place they visited they were told that life had not improved under the "Intervention" and that it had in fact deteriorated. Their message to those who had so generously shared their lives and stories with the members of the "Living Letters" team was that they do not stand alone. They expressed a sense of responsibility to ensure that their voices do not go unheeded.

The WCC central committee, meeting in Geneva 16-22 February, 2011, therefore:

1. ***Expresses*** solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and their right to live in traditional lands; maintain and enrich culture and ensure traditions are strengthened and passed on for generations to come;
2. ***Urges*** the Australian government to end the "Intervention" and instead to engage in proper consultation and negotiation processes which are genuinely inclusive of Aboriginal Peoples, which will better empower and enable them to identify their own aspirations, issues of concern and which will involve their full participation in creating and implementing solutions;
3. ***Requests*** the Australian government to ensure that policies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples comply with international conventions and, in particular, conform to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labour Organization's Covenant 169;
4. ***Calls*** on WCC member churches to continue to raise awareness about the specific issues facing Indigenous Peoples and to develop advocacy campaigns to support the rights, aspirations and needs of Indigenous Peoples;
5. ***Encourages*** WCC member churches to support the continued development of theological reflection by Indigenous Peoples which promote Indigenous visions of full, good and abundant life and strengthen their own spiritual and theological reflection.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Honourable Julia Gillard, prime minister of Australia, appealing to the Government of Australia to respect the wishes of the Yolngu Nations Assembly, 11 June 2012**

The World Council of Churches appeals to the Government of Australia to respect the wishes of the Yolngu Nations Assembly as they call on government not to pursue its interventionist policies, and to foster a spirit of partnership based on the principles of self-determination.

The World Council of Churches has always advocated for the rights of communities of Indigenous Peoples in many parts of the world to live on their traditional lands, assert their identities, and maintain their cultures and traditions.

In September 2010, a team of representatives from the WCC visited the Aboriginal Peoples' communities in the Northern Territory of Australia. During the visit, the team urged the Australian government to end the "Intervention" and instead to engage in proper consultation and negotiation processes which are genuinely inclusive of Aboriginal Peoples, which will better empower and enable them to identify their own aspirations, issues of concern and which will involve their full participation in creating and implementing solutions. The team said, "We do not believe that extending the Intervention under the Stronger Futures legislation, as is currently proposed, will lead to equality and self-determination which is the right of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples".

The central committee of the World Council of Churches at its meeting in Geneva 16-22 February, 2011 too urged the Australian government to ensure that policies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples comply with international conventions and, in particular, conform to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labour Organization's Covenant 169.

In that same spirit, the WCC once again makes this appeal not to pass the legislation of the Stronger Futures Northern Territory Bill 2011. The WCC joins its concerns with those of the Churches in Australia. We believe that social inclusion does not come through policies of intervention but through respect and by enabling self-determination and partnership.

With best regards,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Bangladesh

- **Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Bangladesh, expressing concern over the recent workplace tragedies, 17 May 2013**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write this letter to express our grave concern and sympathies because of recent tragedies in your country. Since late February and onwards your country has faced political and religious violence and atrocities as well as major disasters, such as the collapse of a garment factory building in Savar, Dhaka, which has taken the lives of more than 1000 people.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I express deep sadness over the deaths and injuries of so many people who continue to suffer because of politics, religious persecution and lack of basic human rights and security in the workplace.

The ecumenical solidarity team that visited you on behalf of the WCC and the CCA in April reported on the frightening situation of attacks and persecution against religious minorities in the country. It is very disheartening to hear about this development of communal hatred in Bangladesh, once known for its tolerance and now grappling with religious intolerance and politicization of religion. The systematic violation of human rights is most unfortunate and needs to end. As you know, the WCC is committed to supporting all persecuted minorities, irrespective of their religions, as the human rights and dignity of every person should be upheld.

The WCC believes that it is critical to find sustainable solutions to any conflicts. It calls on all parties involved to adhere to the rule of law and to use of legal and constitutional measures to resolve the differences in their societies. We hope and pray that all peace-loving people of Bangladesh will denounce this new wave of violence and stand together to offer protection to those living in dangerous situations.

The Savar garment factory tragedy shows that Bangladesh needs to introduce immediate steps to improve working conditions of garment factory workers, especially women who are forced to work in unfavourable conditions. Despite having drastically increased their presence in the labour force, Bangladeshi women still face disadvantages and discrimination in the workplace. Labour conditions and safety provisions in factories across the country are not adequate to meet normal labour-law standards and must be improved upon. Bangladeshi authorities need to act immediately to ensure that factories across the country comply with international labour standards stipulated by International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions.

We, as the WCC and members of the global ecumenical movement, stand in solidarity with you and the people of Bangladesh, particularly those who are suffering today. We pray for God's manifold blessings upon all people of Bangladesh.

Yours in His Service,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

- **Call by the steering committee of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reconciliation, Reunification and Development in the Korean Peninsula (EFK), to end the strategy of using food as a political weapon, 27 June 2011**

The silence of the international community to the plight of millions of North Koreans facing starvation and severe malnutrition was of deep concern to the members of an ecumenical forum for peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula, which met last week, 16 to 19 June, in Nanjing, China.

The group, the steering committee of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reconciliation, Reunification and Development in the Korean Peninsula (EFK), called on churches and the ecumenical community to advocate and lobby governments, the United Nations and the

European Union to end the current strategy of using food as a political weapon to isolate the North Korean government and cause its downfall.

Despite being the major donors of food aid to North Korea during the severe food crises following the famine of the 1990s, the United States and South Korea have both withdrawn their food aid to North Korea and imposed sanctions in response to North Korea's policy of developing nuclear weapons and its recent military activities.

There was also concern among the EFK that the lack of the international response to the food crisis in North Korea could threaten peace and security on the peninsula.

"Christians in South Korea are firmly committed to support food aid to our Brothers and Sisters in the North who are faced with starvation," said the Rev. Kim Young Ju, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK). "The NCCK will mobilize financial resources to extend more support to the starving people in North Korea".

Recently the NCCK sent a shipment of 172 tons of food to North Korea with the financial support of the EFK and South Korean churches, despite a South Korean government order prohibiting any civil society and religious organizations from supporting people in North Korea.

The EFK, which is coordinated by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), is composed of representatives from WCC member churches, constituencies and partners from Europe, North America and Asia. It also includes representatives from churches in North and South Korea.

In a statement about the NCCK shipment, the South Korean government criticized the NCCK saying, "it was not right for the church organization to contact the North Koreans and go ahead with the aid shipment without getting South Korean government approval, and the government will take necessary measures."

"Even though the South Korean government is prohibiting us from sending food aid to North Korea, we will follow only the order of Jesus Christ, who taught us to love our suffering neighbours," said Ju.

"While some countries and policy makers see a food blockade as an effective tool to discipline 'recalcitrant countries', in North Korean it has become a weapon to punish poor and voiceless victims," said Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCIA director and chair of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

"Lifting the food blockade will be the best strategy for negotiating towards a lasting peace on the Korean peninsula, and confrontation will not be the ultimate solution to bring the DPRK to the negotiating table," he said.

In a written message, the Rev. Kang Yong Soap, chairman of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) of North Korea, expressed appreciation for the efforts of support and solidarity by the ecumenical family members from around the globe through the coordination of the WCC. The letter was shared with the EFK by Ri Jong Ra, director of International Affairs for the KCF.

"The NCC Korea will continue to arrange shipment of food to North Korea, and the South Korean churches are committed to continue their support and solidarity with the suffering North Korean people. This will also be our prophetic witness," Ju said.

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the chairperson of the Korean Christian Federation in the DPR of Korea, and the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of the DPR of Korea to the United Nations, on the passing of Kim Jong Il, 20 December 2011**

We hereby convey our condolences at the recent passing of the head of state of the Democratic Republic of Korea, KIM Jong Il. I wish to convey my deepest sympathies to the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Christians of the Korean Christian Federation.

We, in the World Council of Churches, pray that the Peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding may bring comfort and strength to all. We also pray for peace, justice and stability to reign in this period of transition and change and for the time ahead. We convey to you our commitment to continue working together for reconciliation and a lasting and Just Peace on the Korean peninsula.

May the Prince of Peace who came to reconcile the world to God preserve and protect you during this time of sadness and uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Fiji

- **Reports of the "Living letters" ecumenical solidarity team visit to the Fiji Islands, 27–29 May 2010**

Pre-visit announcement on Living Letters solidarity visit to Tuvalu, 18 May 2010
A team of church representatives will pay a solidarity visit to churches, ecumenical organizations and civil society movements in Tuvalu from 25-27 May 2010. The team will be travelling as "Living Letters" on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Tuvalu is a small island nation made up of nine tiny atolls near Fiji that stands barely a metre above sea level and is threatened by rising sea levels. In the past years alone, Tuvalu has already lost one metre of land around the circumference of their largest atoll.

According to climate scientists, the 12,000 people living on Tuvalu and the inhabitants of other small islands in the South Pacific are facing the risk of being submerged within the coming decades, because of the consistently rising sea level.

The case of Tuvalu clearly shows how human-induced climate change affects the livelihoods and safety of people, and therefore becomes a challenge to peace.

“The role of the church is to accommodate any issues that jeopardize the way forward for our people ... because the people are carrying God’s image” said the Rev. Tofiga Falani, president of the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu, during the United Nations climate change negotiations, COP 15, in Copenhagen (Denmark). We rely so much on hope and your prayers,” he said. “Our petition is that we want to survive.”

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace.

The “Living Letters” team travelling to Tuvalu in May 2010 will be composed of:
- Bishop Sofie Petersen, Lutheran, Greenland
- Elias Abramides, Ecumenical Patriarchate, Argentina, member of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change
- Nikos Kosmidis, Church of Greece, member of Echos (the WCC Commission on youth in the ecumenical movement)
- Arthur Shoo, director, Empowerment and Capacity Building, All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

Host: Rev. Tofiga Falani, president of the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu

Post-visit report “Losing paradise”, 22 June 2010
Approaching the boat landing of the fishing village on Viwa Island off the coast of Suva, Fiji, it is hard to imagine a more idyllic setting than this South Pacific paradise filled with one stunning island view after another.

On the hillside overlooking the village sits a memorial church dedicated to the memory of a Methodist translator, John Hunt, who translated the Bible from Greek into Fijian more than 150 years ago and who still is revered by the villagers.

In the evening dusk the chapel glows like a beacon across the water. Nestled on the lush slopes leading down to the shore are the homes of the 110 hearty souls who call Viwa home.

It is here in late May that a four-person World Council of Churches (WCC) Living Letters delegation were hosted by the villagers of Viwa who shared with the group their growing concerns in regard to how the shifting global climate and rising sea levels from melting polar ice packs are impacting this small community.

The island itself is small, taking the delegation no more than 15-20 minutes to circumnavigate in an eight-seater boat with an outboard motor. Climatic changes far from here are having an impact on places such as this, and that is why the Living Letters came to listen and show solidarity with the community.

The WCC Living Letters are small ecumenical teams that visit a country to listen, learn and examine approaches to problems and help confront challenges in order to overcome violence and promote peace. In the context of Fiji, the group was exploring how violence against nature through CO2 emissions, land misuse, pollution and other development and lifestyle issues have impact on the world’s climate. In addition to spending 24 hours on Viwa, the team also met with church and government leaders in Suva, the capital of Fiji.

The only time to approach the Viwa dock is during high tide. At the peak of low tide during mid-day in late May, the tranquil waters retreat as much as a kilometre or more at some points exposing expansive and seemingly formidable mud flats.

The daily ritual of this impressive movement of the sea sets the rhythm of life for the villagers. One must move quickly in the morning to catch the last boat out before the waters near the shore become too shallow and eventually recede.

Once the tide is out, life under the intense tropical sun adjusts to a slower pace waiting to resume more robust activity as the water faithfully returns later in the afternoon.

"The sea is eating up the shore line"
Surrounded by this beauty and rhythm, it is hard to imagine what might upset the balance of life in Viwa until Ratu Isikeli Komaisavai, the village coordinator for development projects, reveals that climate change is transforming their lives. "The sea is eating up the shore line and coastline," he said.

And he is right, as evidenced along the steep slopes of the island where in a variety of places there are freshly exposed earthen cliffs, fallen trees and reportedly a water line that appears to be rising higher each year.

This tiny piece of paradise is slowly being eaten away by the impact of events far from these shores. "The biggest threat to us is climate change," Komaisavai said.

While the village sits on the leeward side of the island, the increasingly frequent typhoons and hurricanes assaulting Fiji and other South Pacific nations are slowly stealing away islands like Viwa. But the change is more than coastal erosion.

Changes in temperature mean "crops are not ripe at the regular times of the year", Komaisavai said, echoing the experience of some of the Living Letters team members who came from Greenland, Tanzania, Greece and Argentina.

Bishop Sofie Petersen, who joined the delegation from Greenland, told a group of village elders that increases in temperatures mean the sheep farmers of southern Greenland experience an extended grazing season; others, further to the north, are seeing a melting ice pack change social and economic life.

Delegation member Elias C. Abramides from Argentina told villagers that he recently became aware of harvests occurring later in Argentina and that while farmers at first could not explain this phenomenon, the change is now being attributed to climate change.

It is in the South Pacific region surrounding Fiji where climate change becomes more than a mere discussion about erosion and rising sea levels. More and more, the urgency for government and church leaders in the region concerns the impact on people, particularly those who will have to be resettled.

"Being a church leader is important here," said Fe'iloakitau Kaho Tevi, general secretary of the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC), when the Living Letters team met with the deputy secretary general of the Pacific Islands Forum, Feleti P. Teo.

For Tevi this means the church has a role in the "who, when, where, how and why" as people will need to be resettled from islands such as the Tuvalu atoll which is the most widely-watched nation under threat of rising sea levels.

The church is moving forward with initiatives such as reforestation to prevent erosion during heavy rains. "The second initiative is about building seawalls, and that is being taken by the government and local villages," the Rev. Dr Tuikilakila Wagairatu, general secretary of the Methodist Church in Fiji, said in a meeting with the Living Letters team.

Only recently did the national leaders within the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), which comprises representatives of nearly every national government in the region, seem ready to address the issue of resettlement and relocation.

"The language of the Forum has changed," the PIF's Teo said. "The relocation phase has been entered now, and the reality has dawned on the leaders."

Right now the PIF has no formal position on resettlement. Discussions have yet to take place on the issue of the law of the seas and national interests, so these have not been clearly defined, according to Teo.

It wasn't until he attended the climate change meetings in Copenhagen last December that the newly appointed Fijian minister for Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment, Samuela Saumatua, realized the urgency of the climate change issue for the region. "It is no longer just an academic exercise," he said.

"We don't even have a climate change policy," Saumatua said of the Fijian government. Under his leadership a national policy is being formed, with the participation of the Pacific Council of Churches. Saumatua met with the Living Letters team for nearly an hour and encouraged them to help churches to become more aware of the issues related to climate change.

"Climate change-competent churches"
In an earlier discussion with Methodist general secretary Wagairatu, the Living Letters team discussed the possibility of developing "climate change-competent churches" along the lines of the WCC's programme of developing "AIDS-competent churches" throughout Africa.

For the PCC and the Living Letters team, the report on the government's emerging national policy on climate change was encouraging news.

Meanwhile, attempts to stop erosion and turn back the impact of more and more intense tropical storms may not come in time to help Viwa Island.

"The Pacific people face a real threat with little resources," Komaisavai said to the group on their arrival in Viwa. While most homes remain safe today, there was concern about the erosion near the church pastor's residence which sits several metres outside the main cluster of homes and near a seaside cliff.

Before leaving Viwa, the Living Letters teams took a 15-minute walk toward the other side of the island to a spot where the 19th-century Bible translator John Hunt used to pray. This spot

now holds significance for the villagers, and even more so as they realize that their island is slowly being whittled away. The group prayed for Viwa.

For Viwa, as for many other named and unnamed islands in the South Pacific, the rising ocean waters, the more intense storms and the changes in harvesting times for crops all signal a pending disaster that, unless addressed soon on a global scale, could bring an end to paradise.

- **Statement by WCC general secretary, expressing deep concern about the blatant violation of freedom of religion by the Fiji authorities, 26 August 2011**

WCC calls cancellation of Methodist meeting by Fiji government "unacceptable"
Government interference in church affairs in the Pacific nation of Fiji has been identified as a matter of profound concern by the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Pacific Council of Churches and a meeting of Pacific church leaders, Tveit has expressed his deep concern about the blatant violation of freedom of religion by the Fiji authorities in cancelling the annual conference of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma, and in their detention of church leaders.

"It is absolutely unacceptable that the Fiji authorities intervene in internal church decisions and affairs," Tveit said from Samoa where he is attending the regional meeting.

According to news reports, the military government of Fiji cancelled the annual conference of the Methodist Church, saying the leadership was too political.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has said the leadership and senior members of the church were summoned by the military to hear the order, and the government unsuccessfully attempted to detain the former president of the church, Rev. Josateki Korio.

This is the third year in a row that the government has cancelled the Methodist annual conference. Authorities have also suspended the national constitution, restricted media freedom and detained other opponents.

The church remains critical of the regime.

While in neighbouring Samoa, Tveit held meetings with the Rev. Vaiao Eteuati, general secretary of the Methodist Church of Samoa. Eteuati called on the global church to put pressure on the Fiji authorities against what he calls unjust actions towards the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

Tveit reaffirmed the stance of the WCC central committee who in 2009 proclaimed its support for the churches in Fiji. He also called Christians throughout the world to join in common prayer for the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

French Polynesia (Maohi Nui)

- **Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the re-inscription of French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) on the UN list of countries to be decolonized, Kolympari, Crete, Greece, 28 August–5 September 2012**

The present-day French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) became a French protectorate in 1842 and a French colony in 1880, although it was not until 1946 that the indigenous Maohi people acquired French citizenship. By the end of the 19th century, France had annexed all the islands that now constitute French Polynesia. The islands were governed by France under a decree of 1885.

In 1945, when the UN was founded, one of the first initiatives was to engage in a proper decolonization process, hence establishing a list of territories yet to be decolonized. Article 73 of UN Charter (non-self-governing territories) as well as UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples) describe the UN's mission to decolonise the remaining non self-governing territories. The French colonies of New Caledonia and French Polynesia were on the list of countries to be decolonized. However, in 1947 France succeeded in having French Polynesia withdrawn from the list, with no prior consultation with the people of Maohi Nui.

In 1958, France held a referendum among its colonies in the Pacific islands, but the opposition to French colonization was suppressed. Subsequently, Maohi Nui remained as a French colony. Moves towards increased local autonomy began in 1977, and new statutes creating a fully elected local executive were approved in Paris in 1977. In 2003, French Polynesia's status was changed to that of an 'overseas collectivity' and in 2004 it was declared an 'overseas country'.

Today, French Polynesia is a semi-autonomous territory of France with its own parliament, assembly, president and executive government. Nonetheless, France continues to exert influence on domestic affairs. Leaders have limited power over many essential domestic and international matters. For example, France administers the justice and education system, defence, currency, health, emigration, land rights, environment and international maritime borders without the consent or participation of the Polynesian people.

The political and church leaders in French Polynesia believe that their struggle for freedom, autonomy and right to self-determination should be addressed by the UN. In August 2011 the French Polynesian Assembly voted for the re-inscription of French Polynesia on the United Nations decolonization list. France does not recognize this resolution which was adopted by the majority in the Territorial Assembly.

Effective advocacy efforts for the re-inscription of French Polynesia on the UN list of territories to be decolonized is an essential first step towards self-determination. The primary work should be done through the UN Committee of 24 (Special Committee on Decolonization). In order to achieve this goal, the support of the international community is vital.

In September 2011, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) organized a consultation with political, church and regional actors in the Pacific to discuss strategies on advocating for re-

inscription of French Polynesia on the UN list of countries to be decolonised. The WCC member constituencies in the Pacific asked for WCC's support for their advocacy initiatives during the visit of the WCC general secretary to the Pacific in September 2011.

The Council of the Maohi Protestant Church in its 2012 synod, decided to call on "the support of the Pacific Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches to support its efforts for re-inscription of French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) on the UN list of territories to be decolonized". The Maohi Protestant Church Synod also stated that: "the Council considers the re-inscription of French Polynesia on this list as means to protect the people from decisions and initiatives taken by the French state contrary to its interests; the re-inscription constitutes the recognition of the human rights of the people of French Polynesia; the Council reiterates that it is their faith that will save the Maohi people whose conscience has been manipulated and that it is the people who will take the decision regarding the sovereignty of their nation".

It is in this context that the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012:

A. ***Recognizes*** the universal human rights of all people and in particular the right to self-determination of all oppressed, colonized, indigenous people in the world, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

B. ***Calls*** on France, the United Nations, and the international community to support the re-inscription of French Polynesia on the UN list of countries to be decolonized, in accordance with the example of New Caledonia;

C. ***Encourages*** the French authorities to fulfil their obligations and provide all necessary means for the economic, social and cultural development of the Maohi people;

D. ***Urges*** France to compensate all those affected by nuclear testing and radioactivity;

E. ***Invites*** its member churches and international faith-based organizations to support through advocacy efforts for the re-inscription of French Polynesia to the UN list of countries to be decolonised and its eventual full decolonization;

F. ***Calls*** on the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs to facilitate the global advocacy initiative for the re-inscription of French Polynesia on the UN list, especially the primary work through the UN Committee of 24;

G. ***Prays*** for the people and the churches of Maohi Nui as they embark on their peaceful and just struggle for self-determination.

- **Report from visit of an ecumenical delegation to Tahiti regarding the need for re-inscription of French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) on the United Nations list of countries to be decolonized, 26 April – 2 May 2013**

In Tahiti, an ecumenical delegation was told about the need for re-inscription of French Polynesia (Maohi Nui) on the United Nations list of countries to be decolonized. The delegates discussed various pressing concerns while meeting with the local church leaders, civil society organizations and President Oscar ManutahiTemaru during their visit to French Polynesia from 26 April to 1 May.

The visit was coordinated by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in collaboration with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and the Maohi Protestant Church (EPM).

The delegates expressed solidarity with the local churches on the issue of decolonization and discussed the impact of nuclear tests and protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In 1947 the French government had managed to remove Maohi Nui from the UN list of countries to be decolonized.

“The international ecumenical solidarity visit to French Polynesia comes at the right time,” said Rev. Francois Pihaatae, general secretary of the PCC. “This is significant in terms of accompanying the EPM and the Maohi people while they are struggling to deal with the critical issue of re-inscription of French Polynesia on the UN list.”

The ecumenical solidarity visit follows a statement issued by the WCC central committee in Greece last year, supporting advocacy on re-inscription of French Polynesia on the UN list. This WCC statement and the visit were initiated by the EPM, asking the CCIA to facilitate advocacy on the issue.

The 2012 Synod of the EPM also urged the WCC and the PCC to “support its efforts for advocacy on re-inscription of French Polynesia.”

Rev. TaaroanuiMaraea, president of the EPM, said that the EPM “considers re-inscription of French Polynesia on this list as means to protect the people from decisions and initiatives taken by the French state contrary to its interests,” quoting a decision made at the EPM 2012 Synod.

John Taroanui Doom, WCC president from the Pacific, spoke about the consequences of nuclear testing by France in French Polynesia. “The problems directly and indirectly linked with the nuclear tests in the past thirty years in the French Polynesia are not yet settled,” he said.

“Successive governments in France suppressed the demands from the affected local people and denied people’s legitimate demand for the sovereignty of their land and right to self-determination,” added Taroanui Doom.

A consultation organized by the EPM in conjunction with the international ecumenical solidarity team visit, exploring the issue re-inscription of French Polynesia, was attended by more than 100 participants.

Advocacy initiatives in French Polynesia

In a meeting with the delegation, President Oscar Temaru shared that at the Sixty-seventh Session of the UN General Assembly in February 2013, under agenda item 60, implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the situation of French Polynesia was discussed.

At that time, he said, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu moved a draft resolution on self-determination of French Polynesia. The intention of the resolution is to seek support of

the international community "to restore the inalienable right of self-determination to the people of the territory."

Temaru expressed his hopes that a majority of UN members will vote in favour of the resolution in the general assembly, where this will be finally discussed.

President Oscar Temarau also acknowledged support given by the WCC on this issue. He mentioned the engagement of the CCIA - UN Liaison Office in New York thirty years ago, when the civil society and opposition political party leaders of French Polynesia started advocacy on re-inscription of French Polynesia together with New Caledonia.

The delegation also met with the former president of French Polynesia, Gaston Flosse, who said that "re-inscription is not the real issue of the land. Many powers held by France were transferred but those are not yet used by the locals."

President Temaru also met with the WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, during a meeting of Pacific church leaders in Samoa in 2011.

Rev. Wakira Wakaine, president of the Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and member of the delegation, explained the advantages of re-inscription for a country on the UN list of countries to be decolonized. He shared experiences from his own country, which was re-inscribed in 1986 on the UN list after long struggles by the people.

Members of the delegation also included Rev. Gregor Henderson, Uniting Church of Australia and WCC central committee member, Rev. Francois Pihaate, general secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, Fiji, Rev. Prince Devananda, secretary of mission and ecumenism, Methodist Church of New Zealand, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the CCIA and Faautu Talapusi, WCC's programme executive for Youth and Pacific Church relations.

India

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, at the passing away of Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, 9 April 2010**

Dear Rev. Augustine Jayakumar,

It is with great sadness that we received the news that Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, an outstanding church and ecumenical leader, passed away. The World Council of Churches joins you all in thanking God for the life and witness of Dr Rajaratnam and for his leadership in the church and the ecumenical movement over the years.

We well remember that Dr Rajaratnam provided outstanding service to the church and the ecumenical movement at various levels during his long years of activity. He served as the Asia secretary of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva, the executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India and the president of the National Council of

Churches in India. He gave new vigour to the Indian Christian Dalit movement and was instrumental in initiating ecumenical endeavours to highlight Dalit liberation within international ecumenical and ecclesiastical circles. As chancellor of the Senate of Serampore University and director of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological Seminary, Dr Rajaratnam provided significant contributions to theological education and leadership development in Indian churches.

Coming from a Student Christian Movement background, Dr Rajaratnam was deeply committed to ecumenism and to the agenda of the ecumenical movement for social and economic justice. As a trained economist, he was able to articulate his concerns regarding economic disparities and injustices in development polices of governments and international financial institutions as well as in their economic policies. He believed in and advocated for a people-centered rural development approach, and his deep commitment to challenging inhumane economic and development policies led him to found the Centre for Research on a New International Economic Order (CreNIEO) in the early 1980s.

As we mourn Dr Rajaratnam's passing, the WCC recognizes his invaluable contributions to the church and to society. Let me take this opportunity to express our deep condolences to his bereaved family and colleagues. In this Easter season, we pray that they will find comfort and peace in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

May the Lord bless his memory, and empower us to continue his work.
Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement issued at the WCC and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) consultation on caste-based discrimination, 22-24 October 2010**

No one can serve Christ and caste!
An affirmation of faith from the National Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits,
Convened by NCCI in partnership with WCC, New Delhi, 22-24 October 2010

The church is called to denounce and resist the 'spiritual forces of evil' (Ephesians 6:12) and repent and realize the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). Today caste divisions, caste discrimination and caste violence have saturated the country and divided the church. In this moment of time, we are prompted by the Spirit to repent from our complicity with caste mentality and dismantle its mechanisms, to reconcile all the victims of the system, to restore the fullness of life granted to all children of God and release the power of inherent dignity that has been gifted to all human beings.

Dalits are the worst victims of the caste system
Caste has fragmented us at all levels. Our tables are divided, our communities are divided, and our cemeteries are divided. Dalits bear the inflictions and injuries of such division. We are ashamed that as Christians we are unable to testify to the oneness of life as members of the body of Christ.

Caste discrimination has corroded our inner being and has borne its bitter outward fruits. It has robbed Dalits of their self-esteem; denied them access to places of worship and sources of water for survival; and curtailed their opportunities for education and employment. We are ashamed that we as Christians have spawned such weeds of discrimination when we had opportunities to sow seeds of acceptance, integrity and justice.

Caste violence has broken the body and bruised the soul. Dalit children are shunned, stunted and have their childhood shattered. Dalit women are beaten, raped, and murdered. Dalit men are dispossessed, locked up, and lynched. The evil confluence of caste, class and patriarchy has distorted human dignity and destroyed human bodies. We are ashamed that we as Christians have remained silent while our brothers and sisters have been violated and killed.

Yet though Dalits have been crushed they have not been extinguished, though they have been brutalized they have not despaired. Dalits resilience and resistance in the face of caste division, discrimination and violence invites the church to join in solidarity to denounce and resist the 'spiritual forces of evil' even as we must repent and recommit ourselves to the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand.

As Christians we claim to reflect the mind of Christ but we are vested in the logic of caste. Jesus says "no one can serve two masters, for a slave will either love the one and hate the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other" (Matthew 6: 24). In a context of caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence we announce from the rooftop:" No one can serve Christ and caste!" We also confess that in our caste-infested world "we have decided to follow Christ." Empowered by a deep faith in God, who binds us into communion, who frees us for justice and who heals us towards wholeness, we join together to live faithfully as disciples of Christ in India today. This involves public confession of our complicity in the sin of casteism, reaffirmation of our faith in a God of justice and a radical commitment to solidarity with those crushed under the weight of the caste system.

Our confession
"We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things to this very day."

(I Cor. 4: 13b)

We confess:

Our complicity in sharing in the mindset of caste and perpetuating the workings of evil caste system;

Our individual indifference and collective silence in the face of caste division, discrimination and violence;

Our willingness to let our theological and material resources be captured by the dominant caste and class communities; and

Our unwillingness to allow the abundance of social, cultural, political and economic resources given by God to be utilized for the empowerment of Dalits.

Our reaffirmation
"The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed…" (Psalm 103: 6)

We reaffirm:

Faith in the God of justice who works for abundant life for all human beings. This calls us to name casteism as sin, apostasy and rebellion against God. Caste discrimination is unbelief in God and a crime against human beings.

Love for God in 'the Word made flesh" who links the wounded body of Jesus to 'the broken ones. 'This calls us take sides with the Dalits struggling for freedom and wholeness. Casteism is a rejection of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. Caste discrimination is the extended wounding of Christ among us as the least and crushed ones.

The communion of the Holy Spirit that brings healing with reconciliation for Dalits and contrition with reconciliation among dominant communities. Casteism is a grievance against the Holy Spirit. Caste discrimination manifests signs of enemies of the Holy Spirit, whose greatest gift is love. (I Cor. 13: 13)

The historical working of God, the liberator, accompanier and advocate, who never fails Dalits, at times through the witness of the Church that protects, supports and nurtures the broken ones. This calls us to deepen our solidarity and further our commitment to God's mission of liberation of Dalits.

Hope that the reign of God will come on earth as it is in heaven. This calls us to commit to break all walls of separation trusting in the power of Spirit to make all things new in the way of Jesus and for the glory of God.

Our commitment

"You will know them by their fruits, are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, in the same way every good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears bad fruit…thus you will know them by their fruit." (Matt 7: 16, 17)

We Commit:

To be faithful to Jesus Christ and to realize that being born again means to be born against caste.

- To put our energies and resources to work to end caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence in our churches and society.
- To make our churches courageous and concrete witnesses to the body of Christ free of caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence.
- To our churches serving as zero tolerance zones for casteism and caste-based discrimination and our churches developing policies on social inclusion. That also involves that our institutions become sites that practice preferential option for Dalits in admission, employment and in perspective.
- To designating Lent 2011 as a time of purging caste from our churches. This will be an occasion for developing resources, both theological and liturgical, for use in Sunday schools, youth groups, women's and men's fellowships and pastors' and bishops' retreats with the specific mandate to root out casteism in our mindset and caste discrimination in our way of life.
- To do all that is humanly possible with God as our Helper to save Dalits under attack from the regimes of casteism let loose in our nation. As living members of the body of Christ we will "watch and pray" to prevent Dalit attacks, rapes and murders. Each local congregation and institution will join in God's mission to be defenders of the Dalit right to live in security without fear and be prompters of the Dalit right to live in freedom with justice in our caste violence-prone society.

- **Open Letter of solidarity to Buddhist brothers and sisters expressing sorrow and solidarity over the blasts in the Mahabodhi temple complex in Bodh Gaya, India on 7 July 2013, 16 July 2013**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches, Geneva!

Deeply saddened by the news of the recent blasts in the precincts of the Mahabodhi temple in the pilgrimage town of Bodh Gaya in the north Indian state of Bihar, we convey this letter as an expression of our heartfelt sorrow and solidarity following this unexpected and unjustifiable event which targeted one of your oldest and most holy shrines. What has been subjected to attack is not only an important religious site but also the moral fabric of respect for difference and diversity, which encourages and ensures the equality of people of all faiths. This makes the incident even more deplorable.

We recognize the damage that such unprovoked acts inflict on the religious sentiments of Buddhists across the world and want to let you know that you are not alone in your sense of fear and loss. Though we share the widespread relief that neither the interiors of the Mahabodhi temple nor the Bodhi tree (tree of awakening) widely believed to be a descendant of the Peepal tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment were damaged in the blasts, we acknowledge the very act of targeting a religious shrine as being hugely detrimental to peaceful relations between religious communities, and we condemn the motives behind it. We hope and pray for justice and peace to prevail at this time. May your rich spiritual tradition inspire you to prevent an escalation of events into further violence and inspire a spirit of understanding and right consciousness that will enhance peace and harmony.

This incident has opened our eyes to the fragility of interreligious relations across the world and reminds us, yet again, of the urgent need for people of all religions to commit ourselves more proactively to live in mutual trust and respect. A time such as this challenges us to demonstrate in concrete terms that the power of hospitality can overcome the power of hostility. Today this calls us to both a sensitive and perceptive recognition of the globally connected nature of religious violence, and a firm reaffirmation of our commitment to grow in our understanding of our neighbouring faiths so that we may work together in a spirit of interreligious collaboration and cooperation to further the flourishing of all life.

For Christians, transforming adversity into witness is a mark of the efficacy of the faith which is within us. In a spirit of such understanding we wish and hope that this incident, despite its traumatic and tragic dimensions, may be transformed into an opportunity to offer the world a glimpse of the best of your morality and spirituality as you discern the way forward. To this end we offer you our support and solidarity.

With best wishes,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Indonesia

- **Statement on the situation in Tanah Papua (Indonesia) adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012**

1. The political and jurisdictional landscape of Indonesia has changed in many positive ways since the country started experiencing a democratization process in the late 1990s. However, the political and human rights situation in Tanah Papua have not changed. Over the past several years the Papuan people have been demanding freedom of expression and the right to self determination, but the demands for their legitimate rights have been continuously suppressed by the Indonesian authorities. Despite the fact that Tanah Papua is one of the richest regions of the world in terms of natural resources, the people of Papua have not benefited from its rich resources; rather, they have suffered from underdevelopment as well as a lack of protection of their economic, social and cultural rights.

2. The Papuans have been expressing their grievances about the underdevelopment of their region, economic impoverishment, lack of adequate facilities for health care and education, blatant violation of human rights, and exploitation of natural resources by Indonesian and multinational conglomerates that causes environmental degradation. The Papuans have been deeply concerned about the lack of job opportunities for Indigenous People. Employers, whether it be the government or private business, prefer Indonesians who have migrated to Papua above indigenous Papuans. Thus, where transmigration brings new economic activities, the original inhabitants of Tanah Papua lose their land, cultural identity and are becoming a marginalized community in their own land. Various human rights organizations have reported that the Papuans are still subject to torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and unfair treatment by the Indonesian military and police force. The gross and systematic violations of human rights due to the rampant militarization processes in the region have denied the Papuan people's right to live peacefully in their ancestral land.

3. A Special Autonomy Law no. 21/2001 was introduced in Papua in response to the grievances of the local people with an aim to solve the problem of Papua's political status through peaceful means, respecting human rights and human dignity. However, the fact remains that the Special Autonomy Law has not been consistently implemented by the Government of Indonesia. As a result, indigenous Papuans still feel that they have been unfairly treated by the Indonesian Government and treated inhumanely by the security forces. It is in this situation that civil society groups and the churches, which together represent the overwhelming majority of Papuan opinion, have united around a single intermediary goal: to reject the Special Autonomy Law. They represent the majority opinion of the Papuans: that the right to self-determination is the ultimate solution for the future of indigenous Papuans to live in peace with dignity and freedom in their own land.

4. The aspirations of the majority of Papuan people for their right to self-determination have been consistently expressed over the years. The Papuan National Consensus Collective presented a petition to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2010 to put in place arrangements for the free exercise of the right to self-determination, so that the Indigenous Peoples of Tanah Papua can decide democratically on their own future in accordance with international standards of human rights, the principles of International Law and the Charter of the United Nations. They also urged the United Nations General Assembly to intervene in Papua with a Permanent Observer Mission to oversee the Referendum.

5. The situation in Tanah Papua has deteriorated as the region has been again witnessing an escalation of violence during the past months. The conflicts and tensions between the indigenous Papuans and the Indonesian police led to the killing of several civilians in October last year. The crackdown of a peaceful gathering of Papuan people involved the use of disproportionate force by the Indonesian security forces, brutally beating and killing unarmed civilians on 19 October 2011. This tragic escalation in tension once again poses a wake-up call to Indonesia and the international community, insisting that the grievances of the Papuan people must be addressed without further delay.

6. The WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) has been monitoring the situation in Tanah Papua over recent years. Several visits by staff and solidarity teams have been organized by the WCC in the past years; the last such visit was in July 2008 as part of a WCC's Living Letters Team visit. The leadership of the WCC member church in Papua, the Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua (GKI-TP), has been requesting the WCC to accompany the people in Papua in their struggle for human rights and human dignity and their quest for peace and security. A number of churches and ecumenical organizations related to the WCC and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), have been involved in advocacy concerning the Papuan's struggle for peace with justice and human rights. The churches in Tanah Papua, irrespective of their denominational identities, have been concerned about the situation and convey messages of peace.

7. The churches in Indonesia and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) have remained in constant support of a peaceful resolution of the problems in Tanah Papua. On several occasions the PGI and its member churches condemned the violence and human rights violations in Tanah Papua. The PGI issued a statement in October last year condemning the violence against the Papuans and asked for appropriate actions to set up immediately a Jakarta-Papua dialogue as a commitment to resolve the acts of violence in Papua. Since the situation in Tanah Papua became more tense in October 2011, the CCIA/WCC has been in consultation with the leadership of the PGI, the central committee members of WCC from Indonesia and the CCA about the deteriorating situation in Tanah Papua and finding ways to respond to the critical situation of human rights violations, especially ways for ecumenical advocacy in Tanah Papua.

8. The World Council of Churches believes that on the way to establishing peace and justice, it is imperative to overcome conflicts, violence and human rights violations in order to establish peace and security as well as the right to life and human dignity for all human beings who are created in the image of God. As members of the community that proclaims Christ as the embodiment of peace, we are called to uphold the values of peace with justice and carry the message of the divine gift of peace in any context of violence and conflict. We believe that the sins of violence and conflict divide people and communities and deny their human rights and human dignity. The scriptures teach us that humanity is created in the likeness of God and is graced with dignity and rights. The recognition of this dignity and these rights is central to our understanding of justice and peace. The message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation reminds us of the fact that "we witness the struggle for freedom, justice and human rights of the people in many contexts where brave people struggle without global attention". The context of Tanah Papua is one among many that warrants our attention.

Against this background, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012:

A. ***Expresses*** its deep concern for the deteriorating situation regarding human rights violations in Tanah Papua;

B. ***Requests*** Indonesian authorities to take necessary steps to release the political prisoners, to lift the ban on peaceful assembly of Papuans and to demilitarize Tanah Papua;

C. ***Urges*** the Indonesian government to initiate necessary steps to enter into dialogue with indigenous Papuan people and to take adequate measures to protect their rights and to provide them with their basic needs and rights as the original inhabitants of Tanah Papua;

D. ***Urges*** the Indonesian Government to ensure that the Indonesian armed forces stop the killing and the causing of serious bodily or mental harm to the Papuan people and the abrogation of their human rights;

E. ***Commends*** the churches and ecumenical partners who are engaged in global advocacy for peace, security and human rights of the Papuans;

F. ***Calls*** on WCC member churches to provide long term accompaniment and also to be engaged in advocacy on peace and security for all Papuans in their struggle for the right to life and right to dignity;

G. ***Prays*** for the people and the churches of Tanah Papua as they continue to be engaged in their prophetic witness for peace, reconciliation and hope.

Japan

- **Call by WCC general secretary to the churches around the world to pray for Japan and the Japanese people, following the devastating earthquake and tsunami, 12 March 2011**

In the aftermath of what is being called a "monster" earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan yesterday, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) has called upon churches around the world to pray for Japan and the Japanese people.

Friday, a tremor struck off the coast of Japan and registered 8.9 on the Richter Scale. The quake caused extensive damage and a massive tsunami. Number of deaths remained unclear as of Saturday morning.

"As we are waking up here in Asia today to the images and cries of all who are struck by the twin disasters of an earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan, we are shocked and trembling as we see how vulnerable we are as human beings to disasters of this magnitude," Tveit said in comments made during his visit to Seoul, Korea.

"We express our deepest sympathy and pray for all victims, for their families and for all who now live in fear of further aftershocks, some of which are as strong as many earthquakes," Tveit said. "We pray for those who have lost or cannot find their dear ones, for those who have lost their homes or face the impact of this enormous destruction."

While the extent of the damage is only being calculated today, Tveit said, "We call on all who can help and we pray for them as they embark these extremely demanding tasks."

"For all those who are ready to help the victims, let us help and support in any way we can, and give priority to those who are most vulnerable in this situation. We trust churches around the world will show their solidarity and ACT Alliance will use all available means to address those most vulnerable in countries where they are operative," he said.

In closing Tveit called on "churches around the world to pray for the people of Japan and for all others who are impacted by this ongoing, terrible event. We pray to God who through Christ has shown the deepest solidarity and sympathy with all human beings who are suffering. We pray to God to rescue, restore and renew life in this time of destruction, despair and death."

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Japan, expressing the dismay and sorrow of the world wide church community following the devastating earthquake and tsunami, 23 March 2011**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Words cannot express the dismay and sorrow filling our hearts as we continue to see the pain and suffering of the Japanese people attempting to rebuild lives and restore communities that had been ravaged by the earthquake and ensuing tsunami ten days ago. As the danger of a nuclear catastrophe continues to loom the safety and health of future generations pose serious concerns. The more recent news of radioactive contamination in food has heightened the apprehension and concern as the fragile web of life in which we live is endangered. Indeed, the crisis and challenge before the people of Japan is one that threatens all of humankind as we are all deeply connected in the oikoumene of God's creation.

This inter-connectedness of our being co-habitants of one planet and our being created in the image of the one God compels us to enter into the pain and suffering of the people of Japan with the sympathy of our Lord, Christ Jesus empowered in the knowledge that

"… since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)

While we share the grief of the people of Japan for the lives that have been lost, the loss of livelihoods, we turn our eyes toward heaven seeking God's grace and mercy. We pray for God's grace and divine protection for those who are risking their own lives in order to save others, especially those working at the nuclear reactors and trying to avert a nuclear meltdown. With Christ our hands reach out to comfort those who are engaged in rescue operations and wander through the debris in search for lives.

The World Council of Churches has been following the disastrous situation unfolding in Japan from the very beginning. I have convened a meeting of various colleagues in WCC headquarters who are in liaison with churches and ecumenical partners in different parts of the world, especially the emergency relief and humanitarian aid arm of the ecumenical family the ACT Alliance. It is heartening that several member churches of the WCC have been praying for the people of Japan and trying to mobilise resources to extend all possible supports to our sisters and brothers in Japan through the churches in Japan. I take this opportunity to encourage Christians around the world to continue to support you in prayer and action.

As you seek to comfort and help the many neighbours in need throughout Japan I have no doubt that your commitment to the gospel message of love, sacrifice and service will be a powerful witness to God's love for the nation and people of Japan. May the Spirit of God continue to empower and sustain you with His abundant grace.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Message of solidarity from the WCC general secretary to the "Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan", Republic of Korea, 30 November 2011**

"When justice shall make its home in the wilderness;... and righteousness shall yield peace and its fruit be quietness and confidence forever...Then my people shall live in tranquil country..."(Isaiah 32: 16-17).

The Bible makes justice the inseparable companion of peace; for both point to right, meaningful and sustainable relationships in the living community of women and men with the vitality of our connections with the living earth. While peace is God's gift to a broken but beloved world, justice and love remain God's ethical standard for our relationships as creation. Our Saviour's words proclaim: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you," yet the realities of our violently broken and unjust world make these words like echoes of a distant expression 'the not yet' of our eschatological hope. Media reports and shared narratives reveal existence of pain and dismembering of our bodies and our world. As WCC, our International Ecumenical Convocation of Peace as the culmination of the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010) created a space where such stories were shared and acknowledged; and networks were built to help address this pain for the establishment of justice and peace in our faith communities as well as our world as a whole. Some of these stories were shared by women and about women, who have been subjected to all sorts of violations of their bodies and dignity.

Stories of Asian women who were subjected to sexual slavery by the Japanese military during the WWII keep on reminding us of the fact that during wars and conflict, women's bodies become the battle field. This subjection of women's and girls' bodies as sexual objects and commodities for sexual exploitation has sometimes 'enjoyed' military legitimization that has led to the protection of perpetrators and increased impunity. We acknowledge with sadness that throughout history it has been easier to gain support for collective effort against the general violations of human rights but there seems to be a sustained subtle resistance to

supporting women's human rights. This is mainly because there still exist globally a deeply rooted systemic and sustained subjugation of women. The viewing of women as created mainly for the glory and enjoyment of men has contributed to the many evils that they have been subjected to including sexual violence. Japanese military sexual slavery of Korean women is one of such evils.

As WCC, we have journeyed with you sisters and brothers together with the Women's Association of the National Christian Council in Japan since the early 1990s when the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan launched their first public complaint as part of the struggle for justice in this area. We find this history one of the most painful dehumanization of women. We recall that an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 women were deceptively lured in the name of well-paid job in a Japanese armaments factory or even kidnapped to 'work' in "comfort stations" or brothels byJapanese military from about 1932 until the end of WWII. Most of these women were kidnapped from their communities as young at 11 years of age and were enslaved in the comfort stations for as long as eight years, expected to sexually service up to 50 soldiers daily. After Japan's defeat in 1945, the few women who survived were returned to their homes. Those women who did go home after the end of the war could no longer lead normal lives. Many suffered from psychological and physical illnesses. In our societies which put a high value on chastity, these returnee women were often regarded as "dirty and immoral women", not only by others but also by themselves. Fear of stigmatization and rejection by those around them meant that they were under constant pressure to keep their past secrets so well hidden till the end of their lives. Yet their whole lives they had to live with the terrible nightmare and trauma of that past. Because of these painful realities of their lives, it was only in 1991 when South Korean Kim Hak-Soon, then a grandmother of seventy-four years, broke the almost 50 years' silence regarding this historical plight of women. Other women's testimonies followed that help us to have a glimpse into the injustices and exploitations that these women suffered and what they demand:

"I was playing jump-rope in front of my house when an automobile pulled over. I had never seen a car before in my village. When the driver offered me a ride, I, curious and naive, climbed in with my friend. Immediately, that car rolled on with us in it and then kept on going and going, never returning me to my village...." Ms Kim Yoon Shim, a former "comfort woman," about her abduction at the age of 14."

"The Japanese government must not run from its responsibilities. I want them to apologize and to admit that they took me away when I was a little girl to be a sex slave"[84]

As we move towards our 10th Assembly in 2013 in South Korea, where such painful memories are still embodied, our assembly theme echoes our enduring prayer: "God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace." We pray that such a scandalous evil memories that probably represent the largest organized mass rape of women in recorded history will finally be healed even as the process of justice takes its course. We still bemoan the reality of existing impunity. While the Japanese government in 1993 finally acknowledged their connection to such scandalous evil, there has been no completed process of neither transformative nor

[84] A testimony by Lee Yong-soo, who was about 15 years of age when she was kidnapped by Japanese soldiers from South Korea to work in a brothel in Taiwan. http://www.religioustolerance.org/sla_japa.htm; S.C. Schellstede& Soon Mi Yu. 2000. *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military*, Holmes & Meier Publishers. The book includes the 2000 United Nations Human Rights Report; and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson. 1999. *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*. Mid-Prairie Books.

restorative justice on the part of the party that covers the perpetrators. With you our sisters and brothers, we denounce this still existing impunity and call the Japanese government to put in place a process of truth, justice and healing of memories. While general reparation might be impractical, efforts should be made for material compensation where possible. Churches in Asia should help in bring processes of healing of memories for the women who are survivors and the known families of the survivors as well as those who have died.

As we stand in solidarity with you, we want to encourage you with the prophetic words we can trust as we await their fulfilment in this context. Our Saviour Jesus Christ declares to us:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me; God has sent me to announce good news to the poor and exploited, to claim release for prisoners of pain and shame and recovery of sight for the blind exploiters, to let the broken victims go free, and to proclaim the year of God's favour for justice and mercy" (adapted from Luke 4: 18-19).

- **Statement by the WCC on the first anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in Japan, 11 March 2012**

A year ago we were all confronted with the chain of tragic events unleashed by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster which followed the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011.

We still don't have a clear picture of all the consequences of this disaster, but we know that significant amounts of radioactive material have been released into the atmosphere, the ground and ocean waters.

Some people died because of the direct radiation exposures or related consequences. The estimation of future cancer deaths due to accumulated radiation exposures in the population living near Fukushima range from 100 to 1000. Furthermore, more than 100,000 people have been forced to leave areas with high levels of radiation, which has meant losing their homes, communities and livelihoods. And many still live in contaminated areas, including pregnant women and children who are more vulnerable to the effects of radiation exposure.

The accident showed clearly that, despite all safety provisions, there is no way to guarantee there will be no nuclear accident. Unfortunately, the nuclear industry and its regulators have continued to minimize the dangers and have been unable or unwilling to provide proper protection and support to the people who have been impacted. Interestingly, countries having taken steps to phase out nuclear power, for different reasons, have not suffered an energy crisis. Both Japan, which is presently running only three of its fifty-eight nuclear reactors, and Germany, which permanently has closed half its nuclear power plants, have managed to function normally with energy savings and better usage of other energy sources.

As we move towards the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in a year when the UN calls nations and peoples to help achieve sustainable energy for all, remembering the Fukushima disaster and paying tribute to its victims should encourage governments to take clear steps towards achieving sustainable communities.

As Christians, we believe God called us to life in its all fullness (John 10:10). The Fukushima nuclear accident threatened all forms of life within the disaster zone and this threat continues

with nuclear reactors running and spent nuclear fuel which will remain radioactive and dangerous for millennia. Shortly after Fukushima, 1,000 representatives from churches in every region of the world, gathered in Jamaica for the World Council of Churches' International Ecumenical Peace Convocation. Participants in this convocation said: "The aftermath of earthquake and tsunami in Japan raises urgent questions concerning nuclear energy and threats to nature and humanity… The nuclear catastrophe of Fukushima has proved once again that we must no longer rely on nuclear power as a source of energy".

As we express solidarity with the victims of the nuclear accident in Fukushima, we would also like to honour the many people who have come to their assistance including humanitarian relief, counselling and radiation monitoring supported by Japanese member churches of the WCC. Let us all respond as individuals, communities and nations with concrete steps to protect peoples and the earth from more such tragedies in future.

- **Public comment by WCC general secretary on the 68th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 5 August 2013**

A lifetime after their tragedy, the finest tribute to the destroyed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still lies ahead. It is that we achieve the survivors' hope for all humanity: "No more Hiroshimas. No more Nagasakis." The God of life calls all of us to take up their tireless cry and make certain that a Hiroshima or Nagasaki bombing can never happen again. This year's anniversary needs renewed commitment from the entire world.

Current events in Northeast Asia dramatize how much the region and the world still live in the shadow of Hiroshima-style mass destruction. Churches from 140 countries will gather soon in South Korea for the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches under the theme "God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace". Nagasaki and Hiroshima lie just across a strait from Busan, our meeting place. Our hosts will explain the legacy of annihilation including the fate of more than 40,000 Koreans in the two Japanese cities when the atomic bombs were dropped in August 1945.

That legacy today has two old Cold War rivals – North Korea and the U.S.A. – still brandishing nuclear weapons, missiles and bombers over the Korean peninsula. The dangerous recent displays demonstrate the failure on both sides to learn from Hiroshima and from war itself.

The legacy includes the recent anniversary of the Korean War. Sixty years after a ceasefire, none of the antagonists have a peace treaty. But every country in Northeast Asia has its own nuclear arms or accepts protection from U.S. nuclear weapons. As Buddhist, Christian and civil society organizations in the region have long advocated, the Korean Peninsula must be freed of nuclear weapons as a cornerstone for any durable peace.

Instead, the region is being subjected to new increases in the already massive U.S. military deployments in East Asia and the Pacific. U.S. arms sales to China's neighbours, and a military build-up in China, are fuelling global arms production. In the region old disputes over tiny islands are sharpening.

On this year's atom bomb anniversary a central pillar of peace in East Asia is in danger. Japan's new government appears eager to weaken or drop the peace clause in the national

constitution. This historic post-1945 commitment forbids Japan to wage war and limits its military forces. The clause is widely appreciated by peace loving people in Japan and its neighbours. Christians and Buddhists in North East Asia insist that it not be changed.

Despite the region's shaky nuclear instability, Japanese government officials are also airing speculation that Japan could consider developing nuclear weapons for itself. It is hard to imagine a more pointed dismissal of the lessons of 1945.

There is also fresh proof of the dangers of nuclear radiation to colour the atom-bomb observances this year. As churches and others work to help the survivors of the Fukushima disaster, the Japanese government has confirmed that massive quantities of radioactive water are seeping into the ocean from the stricken plants each day. Radiation in the area will keep tens of thousands of former residents from ever returning to their homes.

Thankfully, with this anniversary, honest assessments of the grave humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are finally bringing new hope in many countries. Some 80 governments recently issued a joint call to all governments that no nuclear weapon should ever be used again under any circumstances. States that have nuclear weapons, and their allies, are finally being called to greater account.

In an era of increasing global consciousness the abiding lesson of August 1945 is one we can recognize. God's gift of life is precious beyond measure. We must protect life for the good of all people. Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never happen again.

Korean Peninsula

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on resolving the rising tensions over the Korean Peninsula, 15 February 2013**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is gravely concerned at the test of another nuclear device on the Korean peninsula this week and at responses which deepen, rather than address, the long-standing tensions in the region.

The nuclear test in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is a destabilizing action in a fragile region. So far, the main responses risk tipping the region into greater crisis. The current situation demonstrates an urgent need for the members of the Six-Party Talks, the six governments most responsible for peace and human security in Northeast Asia, to return to their own earlier path of negotiations and confidence-building.

Hostility from all sides and an increased reliance on military threats are precisely the opposite of what is needed. The governments directly involved – the United States, China, Japan and Russia in addition to South Korea and North Korea – have all been down this road of confrontation and crisis before. Initiatives taken a few years ago for engagement and bridge-building as a path to peace and inter-Korean cooperation, especially economic cooperation, gave much hope. Policies developed to thaw the tension between the North and the South and to reach new levels of trust instead of provocation, isolation, and sanctions were signs of hope.

However, those initiatives were derailed due to various reasons. The tensions mounting these days in North East Asia again warrant finding a way to reach the goal of peace. The new governments in all the six parties should take new initiatives to turn the page in building peace in the region. The need of the hour is to move away from what churches there have called a continual state of confrontation imposed by a narrow concept of "security".

Our hope is that steps will be taken toward renewed inter-Korean engagement, direct contacts between the parties, multilateral negotiations and the redress of unresolved grievances. We also call for signs of recognition that nuclear weapons in anyone's hands are both a symptom of insecurity and a catalyst for instability.

For decades, churches have explored and pioneered different forms of engagement in the Korean Peninsula. In October this year, the WCC will hold its worldwide Assembly in Busan, in the Republic of Korea. The theme of the event is also a prayer, "God of Life, lead us to justice and peace". It is a fervent prayer and a God-given hope for the people of the Korean peninsula as well as for their neighbours.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Statement on peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

"For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." (Eph. 2:14)

We, the delegates of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in Busan from 30 October to 8 November 2013, bear witness to the suffering of the men, women and children of the one Korean people through decades of violence caused by war and hostility that have left them divided into two nations.

Division, war and the suffering contradict God's will for the fullness of life. Therefore, we call upon the churches of the world, and upon those holding social, economic, political and governmental power, to pursue a lasting and sustainable peace with justice that will reunify and reconcile the people of Korea.

The central theme of our assembly is a simple prayer, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace." It is our prayer that the vision and dream of all Koreans, their common aspiration for healing, reconciliation, peace and reunification may be fulfilled.

New challenges to reconciliation and healing
The present situation in the Korean peninsula prompts us to a renewed engagement in efforts to work for peace and justice throughout the region and for the reunification of a divided Korea. Despite many positive developments in the world during the post-Cold War era, the North East Asia region still contains the world's heaviest concentration of military and security threats. Four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, who are also recognized nuclear weapons states, have military bases in this region. There are even signs of an emerging "new Cold War", as the geopolitical map of North East Asia shows new shifts in the balance of power. New tensions are arising with the intensified political,

economic and military presence of the United States in the region; and three other "power poles", China, Japan and Russia, also are active in this region.

Changing geopolitical dynamics among the four major powers could stifle the aspirations and hopes of the Korean people for peace and reunification. Increasing arms build-ups in several Asian countries make this one of the fastest-growing regions for military spending in the world, including nuclear arms and high-tech weapons of mass destruction.

The peace we envision is a condition of justice embracing the whole of life and restoring harmony among neighbours. We are convinced that it is the right time to begin a new process towards a comprehensive peace treaty that will replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement and secure just and peaceful relations among nations in the region while normalizing relations between North and South, and facilitating Korean reunification.

As delegates representing 345 churches and some 560 million Christians around the world, we are prepared to renew our support for peace and reconciliation, and to encourage and assist the national and international leaders whose efforts are indispensable.

Our faith commitment to peace with justice

As a global body of believers in Jesus Christ, we confess our sins in having given in to the powers and principalities of the world in their wars and military conflicts full of hate and enmity, armed with nuclear arsenals and weapons of mass destruction targeting humanity and the whole of God's creation. Also we lament our failure to adequately acknowledge the Korean people's long suffering, caused by external powers fighting for colonial expansion and military hegemony.

We hereby join the Christians in Korea in their confession of faith in Jesus Christ, who came to this world as our Peace (Ephesians 2:13-19); who suffered, died upon the Cross, was buried, and rose again to reconcile humanity to God, to overcome divisions and conflicts, and to liberate all people and make them one (Acts 10:36-40); who, as our Messiah, will bring about a new Heaven and new Earth (Rev.21-22).

With this confession, we join in firm commitment with the Christians of Korea, both North and South, especially in Korean churches' faithful actions to work towards peace, healing, reconciliation and reunification of their people and their land.

Faith and hope in action

Ever since its First Assembly in 1948 and the Korean conflict that followed, the WCC has felt the pain of Korea's division and to some degree has found it reflected in tensions among members and partners. We are well aware of the challenges and obstacles on the pathways to peace. We recognize the painstaking effort of Christians in Korea, both North and South, and recall the continued and sustained efforts of the WCC and its ecumenical partners in accompanying the people of the Korean peninsula.

In the midst of an extremely difficult situation, the Korean churches' ecumenical witnesses and prayers have been pivotal. Such faith in action led them to new horizons of hope with prayers. The Tozanso consultation, organized by the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) in 1984, was held at a time when it was difficult for the Korean churches to openly discuss the issue of Korean reunification. The Tozanso consultation was the first attempt by the WCC to bring Christians from a wide spectrum of member churches

worldwide together with Christians from Korea, to look at some of the issues raised by the division of the Korean peninsula. The WCC initiative helped to address the issues of the division of Korea and Korean reunification as means to strengthen the Korean people's struggle for peace with justice.

In 1988 the decisive Declaration of Korean Churches for National Unification of the Korean People and Peace in the Korean Peninsula set 1995 as the Year of National Jubilee for the churches in North and South, and affirmed the five principles of: 1) self-reliant unification, 2) peaceful unification, 3) national unity through trust and cooperation, 4) democratic unification by people's participation, and 5) North-South relations based on a humanitarian approach.

We recognize the value of ecumenical engagement in advocacy initiated by the WCC addressing peace and reconciliation as well as denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Those initiatives provide avenues for North and South Korean church leaders as well as church and ecumenical partners from Asia, North America and Europe to come together within the setting of a common platform. The Ecumenical Forum on Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, coordinated and facilitated by the WCC/CCIA with the participation of churches in Asia, Europe and North America in addition the churches in South Korea and the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea has provided additional and frequent opportunities for mutual dialogue and interactions on peace and reunification. Although progress has been made at various levels, there is still a long way to go to accomplish the mission of peace and reunification on the Korean peninsula.

We recall that major WCC events in the past have been venues for historic meetings of church leaders of North and South, starting with the Moscow central committee meeting in 1989 and including WCC assemblies in Canberra (1991), Harare (1998) and Porto Alegre (2006). Various other international consultations held subsequently with the participation of churches from North and South Korea lent further authenticity to ecumenical advocacy on peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula. The international consultation organized by the CCIA in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of the Tozanso process in October 2009 helped to provide new impetus for working towards the goal of witnessing for peace, justice and unity, and it encouraged dialogue and participation for all who have been affected by the tragedy of division. In addition, visits to North Korea by the WCC general secretaries in 1999, 2009 and 2013 have lent credence to the commitment of the WCC and its member churches in supporting the churches in North and South Korea seeking peace and reunification.

We are conscious of the fact that the prevailing geo-political context of the Korean peninsula warrants that the ecumenical movement develop new ways of accompaniment and engagement. As the WCC has been accompanying the churches and people in the Korean peninsula in their struggle to achieve peace with justice and reconciliation, and reunification of the divided Korean peninsula, it is imperative that every effort continue to be taken in providing common platforms for both North and South Korean churches to meet together, with a particular focus on younger generations.

We also discern signs of hope and a framework that would enable the Korean peninsula to embrace peace with justice and fullness of life. On the Korean peninsula, shared human security and human rights must become a greater priority than divisive, competitive and militarized national security. The threat of nuclear weapons has long been recognized, and now serious questions are raised concerning all nuclear energy. With many in the world, the churches share the conviction that a world without nuclear weapons is both necessary and

possible. Our shared hope for a nuclear-free world would not only be for the people of the Korean peninsula but for all people in the world, renouncing nuclear weapons and working together for their complete dismantling, leading other regions and showing the way. Hope and possibilities such as these motivate the churches to make greater efforts to work for peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula in response to God's promise to lead us towards justice and peace as hallmarks of God's reign. "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." (Eph. 2:14)

The way towards healing, reconciliation and peace

During the sixty long years since combat ceased in the Korean War, through the Armistice Agreement of July 27, 1953, the two Koreas, the U.S.A. and China have nevertheless continued in a technical state of war with defensive military build-ups including the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. The current situation proves the urgent need for a peace treaty to replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement.

Fresh and decisive action is required to enact a peace treaty. A process towards a peace treaty is crucial for the Korean peninsula and in the entire North East Asia region, as well as contributing to the process of building a nuclear weapon-free peace zone in this region. The peace treaty must be discussed and agreed by the parties to the Armistice Agreement and the countries related to the Armistice Agreement. We believe that a declaration of the end of the Korean War shared by stakeholders will accelerate the agreement's conclusion and contribute to mutual trust and confidence-building among them. Participants in the Six-Party Talks (SPT) previously promised to hold peace forums in order to convert the prevailing armistice system into a concrete peace system. We strongly urge South and North Korea, the U.S.A. and China to ensure the keeping of this promise. At the same time, the U.S.A. and Japan should stop imposing blockades and sanctions against the North, while China should act in its facilitator's role in order to resume dialogues, including the Six-Party Talks.

Taking into consideration the continuing humanitarian crisis in the North, we urge the international community to initiate humanitarian support to the people while cooperating with the North in projects for its sustainable development. It has become clear that economic sanctions serve primarily as instruments for punishing the people of a country, especially the poor in any society. Therefore, we question the ethical principles as well as the strategic effectiveness of economic sanctions imposed on North Korea. It is in this context that we raise concern about the UN Security Council Resolutions against North Korea. Opportunities for economic exchanges between the North and other countries in the world must be resumed. This will open new avenues for effective economic collaboration. Above all, this will facilitate active engagement through dialogue to normalize relations. The UN should also initiate efforts for peace-building across the Korean peninsula and lift the existing economic and financial sanctions.

The way forward – recommendations

We believe that peace-building in a globalized and interdependent world is a shared responsibility of sovereign states, the United Nations and civil society groups including the churches. Affirming the Christian calling to be peace-makers and responding to the faith witness of the Korean churches, which have proclaimed the Jubilee among the Korean people, the member churches of the WCC, gathered in Busan, Republic of Korea for the WCC 10th Assembly from 30 October to 8 November 2013, together affirm the following:

1. Realizing that as we pray with and for the peoples of Korea the churches and ecumenical partners have a specific responsibility toward working together for peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula with renewed energy, in close partnership and transparent relationships with each other and with the churches and Christians in both North and South of Korea, the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Korean Christian Federation. We, therefore, commit ourselves to:

   a) ***Embody*** the spirit of the Tozanso process including courage, caring, communication, confession, conciliation and commitment;

   b) ***Pray*** with the peoples and churches of Korea by designating the Sunday before 15 August as the "Sunday of Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula";

   c) ***Provide*** a wide ecumenical platform for young generations both in North and South Korea to meet together in order to envision a desirable future of the Korean Peninsula;

   d) ***Organize*** solidarity visits to churches in North and South Korea that can serve as peace-makers and bridge builders. A first visit can be organized as early as 2014, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the historic Tozanso International Consultation; and

   e) ***Continue*** accompanying the churches of Korea by providing common platforms for churches and Christians from both North and South to meet together in order to advance towards reconciliation and peace. We recognize that a historically symbolic moment for such initiatives could be found in 2015, the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Korea.

2. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to take actions to:

   a) ***Work*** with our governments to mandate the United Nations Security Council to initiate new efforts for peace-building across the Korean Peninsula and to lift the existing economic and financial sanctions imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea;

   b) ***Embark*** upon a universal campaign for a peace treaty to replace the Armistice Agreement of 1953, bringing an end to the state of war;

   c) ***Call*** upon all foreign powers in the region to participate in a creative process for building peace on the Korean peninsula by halting all military exercises on the Korean peninsula, by ceasing their interventions and reducing military expenditures;

   d) ***Ensure*** the complete, verifiable and irreversible elimination of all nuclear weapons and power plants in North East Asia, by taking steps to establish a nuclear-free world and simultaneously joining the emerging international consensus for a humanitarian ban on nuclear weapons in all regions of the world, so that life is no longer threatened by nuclear dangers anywhere on earth;

   e) ***Urge*** the governments in both North and South Korea to restore human community with justice and human dignity by overcoming injustice and confrontation, and to heal human community by urgently addressing the humanitarian issue of separated families, by establishing a sustainable process allowing confirmation of the whereabouts of family members and free exchanges of letters and visits, and by offering the support of international agencies where necessary; and

f) ***Work*** with the governments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea in providing international cooperation to maintain a truly demilitarized zone (DMZ) and transform it into a zone of peace.

APPROVED

The following delegates and entire delegations wished to register their dissent that the statement does not include a concern of special relevance to the Korean peninsula, namely the plight of conscientious objectors to military service:

Evangelical Church in Germany
Waldensian Church
Church of the Brethren
Church of the Brethren in Nigeria
Eglise du Christ au Congo - Communauté mennonite au Congo
Mennonite Church in Germany
Mennonite Church in the Netherlands
Friends United Meeting
Canadian Yearly Meeting
Ms Eun-Young Lee, Korean Methodist Church
Ms Alison Jane Preston, Anglican Church of Australia
Rev. Sarah Campbell, United Church of Christ
Rev. Kelli Parrish Lucas, United Church of Christ

Malaysia

- **Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to the churches in Malaysia regarding attacks on churches and church buildings due to the controversy over the use of the word "Allah" for God by non-Muslims, 13 January 2010**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with profound sorrow that we heard the news of churches being attacked in different parts of Malaysia and of the nine church buildings firebombed during the past five days due to the controversy over the use of the word "Allah" for God by non-Muslims.

While Christians in majority Muslim countries all over the world, including your neighbouring country Indonesia, have used the word "Allah" for God for centuries, it is very disturbing to hear about this new controversy generated by a small sector of Muslims opposing the use of "Allah" for God by Christians. In fact, this action will only challenge tolerance and restrict religious freedom as well as negatively affecting the "One Malaysia" policy commitment made by the government which aims to ensure that racial harmony becomes a central policy for the country.

The World Council of Churches, as a fellowship of churches around the world, remains deeply concerned about these developments of communal disharmony. We hope for an immediate action by both the government and civil society to resolve the conflict, in order to avoid renewed hostilities and escalation of violence in society.

While appreciating the statement from the prime minister of Malaysia that 'violence has not been part of the practice of religion in Malaysia' we hope that immediate measures will be taken to resolve the problem and that all perpetrators of these acts of violence will be brought to justice. It is heartening to see that numerous Islamic organizations and leaders have publicly condemned these wanton acts of a small group of people.

As you pass through this time of trouble and anxiety, we express our solidarity with all members of the churches and we call upon churches in Malaysia to continue their search for peace. We pray for peace and reconciliation among the people of different faiths and communities in your nation. May God Almighty strengthen you to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14).

Yours in Christ's love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Myanmar

- **Statement of the WCC executive committee on free and fair elections in Myanmar, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010**

1. Myanmar has been under military rule since 1962. During this time, the government has been reduced to an amalgam of agencies serving various purposes of a military agenda. The challenges faced by the people of Myanmar are multifaceted and complex. The country has been entrenched in ethnic, political and armed conflicts between the repressive ruling military regime, political opponents and ethnic groups, resulting in the displacement of over 3.5 million people.

2. Human rights abuses have been systemic over the years. The militarization of society and politics, social and political control of local administration, and non-independence of the judiciary are reasons for intensifying systemic violations of the civil and political rights of its citizens. The courts' function is subordinate to the executive, and they can neither function in accordance with the laws that they are supposed to uphold, nor can they function in a manner that can defend, let alone implement, human rights. The socioeconomic and political situation in Myanmar continues to be a serious concern to the international community.

3. In 2008, the government of Myanmar pushed for a new constitution through a referendum that lacked credibility. The referendum was conducted even as the country faced its worst

natural disaster, Cyclone Nargis, in which more than one hundred thousand persons perished and tens of thousands of others were left without homes.

4. There has been much criticism about the way the new constitution was introduced. The new constitution is designed to ensure the continuation of the status quo with semi-elected parliaments at the national and regional levels, in which the military will hold a quarter of all seats and exercise authority through key governmental positions.

5. Under its provisions, it appears the armed forces are placed outside judicial authority and will be the constitution's guardian. Under the new constitution, all rights are qualified with ambiguous language permitting exemptions of the state's choosing, the revocation of rights at any time and suspension of rights during a state of emergency. These qualifications will render meaningless all guarantees of rights.

6. The last democratic election in the country was held in 1990, but the military dictatorship refused to acknowledge the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party led by Aung San Suu Kyi. Following the adoption of a new constitution, a Political Parties Registration Law was introduced early this year. The date was announced for holding an election for the first time in twenty years, now scheduled to take place on 7 November 2010. Restrictive provisions of the Political Parties Registration Law will assure that many imprisoned dissidents will be excluded from the election process. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the NLD who has been sentenced to house arrest for many years, will not be able to contest the forthcoming election. The NLD, which had refused to take part in the election, was also disbanded.

7. The new constitution has innumerable flaws and does not promise to ensure inclusive, free and fair elections. It is perceived by national and international observers that, if the elections are conducted within the framework of a questionable constitution and according to the restrictive provisions in the Political Parties Registration Law, the military's power will only be entrenched even after the election. As the constitutional provisions reserve a quarter of the seats in national and regional legislatures for the military, it will create a powerful national defence and security council controlled by the commander-in-chief, who can wield extraordinary powers.

8. In Myanmar, which has been ethnically, socially and politically divided, any national reconciliation and democratic transition process should be based on essential processes that will uphold the fundamental freedoms and rights of all citizens. It is the responsibility of a credible government and an independent election commission to create favorable conditions to allow free participation of all citizens in the elections.

9. Multiparty representation and unobstructed participation in the electoral process, a free media, freedom of expression and an independent election commission are fundamental parts of a free and fair election process. While the top military leaders have stepped down from their positions to contest in the election, several opposition politicians still are being held as prisoners. Even before the date of the elections was announced, the military-backed 'Union Solidarity and Development Party' began to campaign across the country, including on all state-owned television channels and other government-controlled media.

10. The international community has unequivocally stated that unless all political prisoners are released and allowed full participation in the campaign and polling process, the

elections will have neither legitimacy nor credibility. Various governments and international and regional civil society organizations have stated that the planned elections cannot be free and fair under existing conditions. Specific constitutional provisions reserve seats for the military in both houses of parliament and key ministries, which ensures that current and former military officials will dominate when a new government is formed.

Against this background of mounting concerns about the situation in Myanmar, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010:

A. ***Urges*** the Myanmar authorities to take adequate measures to hold inclusive, free and fair elections, allow for the presence of international election observers, release all political prisoners without delay, respect fundamental freedoms for all, and that military rulers amend electoral laws to allow political equity;

B. ***Requests*** the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries to call on the authorities in Myanmar to ensure that the election is free, fair and effective as a mechanism to further accelerate progress in the implementation of the roadmap for national reconciliation and democracy.

• Report of Living Letters solidarity visit to Myanmar, 28 October-3 November 2010

A team of church representatives from Europe, Canada and Asia paid a Living Letters solidarity visit to churches, ecumenical organizations and civil society movements in Myanmar from 28 October to 3rd November 2010. This delegation was sent by the World Council of Churches (WCC) as a sign of international ecumenical solidarity.

The focus of the seven-day long visit was on the Myanmar churches' witness to Just Peace in a context of dictatorship by the ruling military junta, as well as political unrest and repeated outbreaks of conflicts that the country has faced over the past decades.

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace.
The WCC Living Letters delegation to Myanmar was composed of the following:
International delegates:

- Ms Berit Hagen Agøy, general secretary, Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, Norway
- Mr Graham McGeoch, WCC central committee member, Church of Scotland, United Kingdom
- Ms Gloria Kalpona Sarker, Department of Women, National Council of Churches of Bangladesh, Bangladesh
- Canon Rev. Canon John Steele, Anglican Church of Canada, Canada
- Mr Charlie Ocampo, Christian Conference of Asia, Australia

Local delegate:
- Rev. Saw Shwe Lin, general secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches

WCC staff:
- Ms Tara Tautari, New Zealand
- Ms Ani Ghazaryan, Armenia

Praying for change in Myanmar

"We believe in change and ask that you continue to pray for us." This was the message an international team of church representatives heard again and again, as they visited people and churches in Myanmar recently.

The group, which included Christians from Bangladesh, Canada, Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom, was travelling as "Living Letters" on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The Living Letters team, hosted by the Myanmar Council of Churches, visited Myanmar between 28 October to 3 November, shortly before the country held elections for the first time since 1990.

As they met with Myanmar member churches of the WCC as well as partner organizations and civil society movements, the team learned first hand about the churches' witness to Just Peace despite the nearly four decades of military rule in the country.

The call for peace and justice is not an easy one to convey, the team was told, especially as churches there strive to support their communities in times of political and economic difficulty.

One of the poorest countries in South East Asia, Myanmar has seen a rapid degradation of its economy and environment. It is within this context that churches work ecumenically to provide assistance to communities in need.

Often working with the "poorest of the poor", the churches are confronted daily with the realities of communities that are on the receiving end of decades of poor macroeconomic management, isolationist policies and trade sanctions. The issues they tackle range from the internal displacement of people, relief and resettlement, water security, HIV and Aids, to violence against women and children.

Despite such challenges, the churches retain a spiritual vibrancy and hope for the future that remains a powerful witness to a country in flux.

The general election which was held 9 November amid boycott calls by the dissident National League for Democracy (NLD) and a crescendo of international criticism of the poll process did not yield a hoped for change in the political landscape.

Instead the ruling elite maintained most of the power. One hopeful outcome, however, was the 13 November release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi who had been under house arrest for a decade and a half.

Churches are conveying a clear message to their membership that they have an important role to play in civil society promoting peace within Myanmar. They are also seeking to provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue and reconciliation in contexts of violence and conflict.

During the Living Letters visit, WCC member churches in Myanmar reiterated their commitment to the movement for Christian unity and encouraged the WCC fellowship to stand in solidarity with their churches.

Noting their relative isolation to the outside world, the Myanmar Council of Churches called for more opportunities for mutual encounter and learning. This desire for closer relations was also palpable when the international visitors met with the Rev. Dr L. B. Siama of the Mara Evangelical Church.

The church, which is located in a remote, underdeveloped corner in the northern part of the country, joined the WCC in 2001, becoming its fourth member church in Myanmar. “We want to walk hand in hand with ecumenical brothers and disters around the world – drawing strength from each other,” Siama, principal of the Mara Evangelical Church’s Lorraine Theological College, told the Living Letters team.

• Report from ecumenical solidarity visit to Myanmar, 4-9 August 2011

Myanmar was visited by an ecumenical solidarity team representing the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 4 to 9 August 2011 as part of the council’s commitment to accompany churches in conflict situations. This was a follow-up to a WCC Living Letters team visit to Myanmar in late 2010.

The five participants in the international ecumenical solidarity team included WCC central committee members, Asian church representatives from neighbouring countries and WCC staff.

The members of the solidarity team were given opportunities to understand the social and economic realities of the people under the new political dispensation in the country.

Prior to the visit to Myanmar, the members of the delegation visited a refugee camp in Thailand populated by hundreds of Myanmar citizens who had to flee from conflict zones in Myanmar and who crossed the border to Thailand where they are now waiting for grants of asylum in other countries.

Rev. Rothangliani Chhangte, a member of the WCC central committee representing the American Baptist Churches (ABC) in the U.S.A. observed that the international community needs to be more conscious of the problems in Myanmar, especially the plight of refugees who are seeking asylum in a third country.

Solidarity with refugees

At the last central committee meeting, Chhangte made an intervention on the need for ecumenical accompaniment to address the plight of Myanmar citizens and the situation of internally displaced people, refugees and migrant workers from Myanmar.

Upon her return from Myanmar, she stated that a “re-opening of the registration process in refugee camps in Thailand is much needed. There are more than 150,000 refugees living in crowded camps along the Thai-Burma border.”

"In 2005, the Thai government allowed the UNHCR to register people who wanted to be resettled in a third country," However, she added, "This was a one-time registration, and since then the Thai government has resisted requests to re-open registration. The United States has resettled the bulk of the refugees along with a few European countries, Canada and Australia."

Chhangte coordinates the work of the ABC dealing with migrants from Myanmar in the United States. She reports that "the American Baptist Churches currently have more than 100 congregations across the U.S.A. with sizable numbers of Myanmarese who have migrated to the U.S. More than 80,000 Myanmar refuges have migrated to the U.S since 2006."

Semegnish Asfaw, who coordinates WCC Living Letters team visits, said that "the members of the solidarity team noted that the youth and women were not so hopeful about their future, given the current situation in the country, although there has been a political change recently. After the long years of conflicts and political stalemate in the country, many young people think that their future seems pretty gloomy."

The team heard stories of human trafficking, especially of women and young girls. Hundreds of women have been trafficked to neighbouring countries in recent years for forced marriages or forced labour.

In a meeting with church leaders in Myanmar, the visiting delegation heard that since the last general election in November 2010, "Myanmar is slowly evolving towards a more democratic state. However, the new political trend is to introduce changes in a rather slow process which may not be appreciated by the people, who have suffered long enough."

Churches as peace-makers

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC, said that "the church leaders in Myanmar are concerned about the resumption of the conflicts in several states where Christians constitute a large segment of the population."

According to Mathews George, "Over years, the Myanmar churches have played roles in peace and reconciliation, and the effectiveness of that witness is visible in ceasefire agreements in areas like Kachin state, where the ethnic Kachin tribes represented by the Kachin Independent Army and Kachin independence organizations were in conflict with the Myanmar military for years. However, ceasefire negotiations have stalled since the end of June, posing a serious threat to any reasonable political changes in the country."

Church leaders reported that in Kachin State, several thousand people have been displaced as a result of the conflict that broke out in past weeks, and people are facing serious food shortages as well as the spread of diseases including malaria.

- **Minute adopted by the WCC central committee on churches' participation in reconciliation and peace-building amidst ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, Kolympari, Crete, Greece, 28 August–5 September 2012**

Following the general elections held in 2011, Myanmar entered into a new era of changes and reforms in its political landscape. The reforms introduced by the new government so far have created the potential for increased freedom in the country. This is apparent particularly through the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and her election to the parliament together with the victory of more than forty other members of the National League for Democracy in a by-election. The new government has introduced several positive changes. However, the major concern of ethnic communities in conflict-affected regions is that the centrally-directed reforms have not had much impact on ordinary people's lives, especially in the conflict-ridden country sides.

In a country such as Myanmar where ethnic communities constitute over 30 per cent of the total population, genuine political reforms cannot be achieved if the grievances of ethnic minorities and their demands for rights are not addressed. For more than half a century, various armed ethnic groups have been fighting against "Burmanization" and the control of a militarized government. In order to reach the goal of sustained peace, ceasefires agreed between the government and armed ethnic groups must include a wide range of stakeholders.

Christians in Myanmar, a predominantly Buddhist country, have often been accused as the agents of waging war against the government. The new political climate and prospects for changes are now giving opportunities for the meaningful participation of Christians in nation-building as well as peace and reconciliation. It is widely recognized now that Christians in Myanmar can continue to play an active role in peace-building, especially in facilitating talks between ethnic minorities and the government in addition to initiating peace-building within local communities. The Christian leaders in the country, especially those who are in the Karen and Kachin states, are hopeful of the renewed attempt at peace talks.

The Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), the main Christian denomination in Kachin State, has long been involved in peace-building at community levels. The leaders of KBC have been instrumental in negotiating peace between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the government. The Kachin State had witnessed peace for a while after the KIA entered into a ceasefire agreement with the central government in 1994. However, that agreement failed to produce a political solution to the Kachin ethnic group's calls for autonomy and other rights. It is heartening that the new government is currently pursuing negotiations with 12 armed ethnic groups and has so far signed ceasefire agreements with some of them. The peace talks with the Karen National Union (KNU), involved in the longest-running insurgency in the country, have had some positive results. It is an alarming trend that inter-communal violence started in June this year between ethnic Muslim Rohingyas and Buddhists in Rakhine has evolved into large-scale state sponsored violence against the Rohingyas. In the Rakhine state, the ethnic Rohingyas live as stateless people as the Rohingyas are perceived as not part of the ethnic nationalities and have not been issued citizenship.

The World Council of Churches through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) has been engaged in advocacy on democratization, human rights, peace and reconciliation in Myanmar. The executive committee of the WCC issued a statement in February 2010 calling for free and fair election in Myanmar. The CCIA recently organized an international consultation jointly with the Christian Conference of Asia and the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) on 'peace, security and reconciliation in Myanmar' which was addressed by the Nobel Peace Laurite Aung San Suu Kyi, who was kept under house arrest for 15 years. The consultation tried to identify the role of Churches and ecumenical bodies in Myanmar as well as the role of Christian participation in peace-building.

The MCC has now engaged in a process to reflect on the pathway to reconciliation, sustainable peace and security in Myanmar and the role of the churches in serving justice and peace. While expressing "the concern about the involvement of business interests in current peace-making efforts, which could obstruct efforts towards peace", the MCC in a statement recently urged "the need for all parties to ensure that fragile ceasefire does not break down but develop into firm and sustainable peace agreements". The statement of the MCC also stated: "listening to the voices of the churches and other faith communities, who are rooted in the local communities, should remain essential for a genuine peace process".

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012, therefore:

A. ***Appreciates*** the initiatives taken by the Myanmar churches in peace-building in Myanmar

B. ***Encourages*** WCC member churches and specialised ministries to accompany and support the initiatives of the Myanmar Churches in peace-building at the grassroot levels;

C. ***Supports*** the facilitation of Myanmar churches in encouraging peace negotiations between the ethnic insurgencies and the government of Myanmar;

D. ***Encourages*** the Myanmar churches to advocate for the cessation of violence against the Muslim Rohingyas and a safe return of internally displaced Rohingyas to their homes.

E. ***Recommends*** the CCIA to continue to monitor the situation and global advocacy on peace, security, reconciliation in Myanmar and support the Myanmar Council of Churches in its mission and witness in coordinating the peace and reconciliation initiatives.

Pakistan

- **Letters of concern from the WCC general secretary to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president, and Mr Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, prime minister of Pakistan, regarding the killing of Christians arrested under the blasphemy laws of the country, 23 July 2010**

Your Excellency,

It is with great dismay that we received news that two young Christians, Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and his brother Sajid Emmanuel, were shot dead by religious extremists in broad daylight in front of a district court compound in Faisalabad on 19 July.

We understand that the two brothers were arrested by police on the accusation made by a complainant alleging that they produced a handwritten leaflet which was defiling Prophet Mohammad. Reports said that police had brought the accused to a court of law to obtain their

remand and as the police and brothers were about to leave the court compound they were attacked by a group of gunmen.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has expressed in the past its concern about the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan, and we do so again in indicating that the introduction of Blasphemy Law in the Pakistan Penal Code touches upon some of the more sensitive aspects of civil and religious liberty. The law is also fraught with danger that can be abused by extremist groups when dealing with religious minorities. It has been proven in the past that the charges of Blasphemy law appear to be arbitrarily applied and at times founded on malicious accusations against individuals and groups.

The WCC has expressed its concern in the past and many others stated the same that the introduction of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan is inimical to and destructive of the harmony and wellbeing of people who live together in a religiously plural society. The misuse of the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan has led to physical violence, damage, destruction of properties and loss of life within the innocent Christian minority over the years. This is a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan.

Your Excellency, we appeal to you to ensure immediate and necessary actions to bring to justice those who are responsible for the killing of Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and his brother Sajid Emmanuel. We also urge Your Excellency to initiate measures towards the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws and to secure the rights and dignity of all individuals in Pakistan society.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Rt. Rev. Samuel Azariah, moderator of the Church of Pakistan, expressing the solidarity of the WCC and all WCC member churches to their Pakistani brethren as they face catastrophic floods, 3 August 2010**

Dear Bishop Azariah,

I write with a heart heavily burdened by the pain and suffering the people of Pakistan have had to endure during the last few days because of recent flooding due to the heavy monsoons. I am shocked to hear of the devastation, more than 1,500 lives lost and some 14,000 homes lost, throughout the affected regions of the country.

Yet, in the midst of a deep sense of grief I am encouraged and strengthened to hear of the many good works that have already been undertaken by the Christians of Pakistan, including the Diocese of Peshawar which has professionally launched its emergency Relief and Rescue Programme, providing much needed assistance and support for not only Christian families but also those of other religions and minority groups.

This faithful service to neighbours in this time of need is commendable. Along with WCC member churches around the world I express my most fervent prayers on behalf of the churches in Pakistan and all the people of Pakistan as you strenuously work to comfort the

bereaved, provide for the weak and to prevent further damage and destruction to lives and property.

I also call upon all the member churches of the WCC to not only pray for the people traumatized by this tragedy but to also step forward with expressions of solidarity with the people of Pakistan by providing the much needed resources for rebuilding lives. You can be assured that the WCC will continue to work closely with the relevant partners in ACT Alliance and other specialized ministries to provide emergency relief and explore other forms of assistance necessary.

May the power, mercies and grace of our Triune God preserve and strengthen you.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from the WCC's general secretary to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president of Pakistan, expressed solidarity in the face of the overwhelming humanitarian crisis affecting the country resulting from the worst floods in the history of Pakistan, 3 August 2010**

Your Excellency,

As the people of Pakistan struggle to come to terms with the trauma and devastation wrought by the recent floods I wish to express our solidarity with you and all those who have suffered loss of life and livelihoods. Although human words often fail to comfort and console grief on such a large scale I wish to assure you that the World Council of Churches (WCC), and all those within its fellowship of churches all around the world, are praying for you and all those seeking to provide for those in need.

Although Pakistan has experienced monsoons in the past the extent of damage wrought by the recent floods, the worst in the history of the nation, has been daunting. I appreciate the extent and speed with which the government has responded to the disaster, providing boats and military machinery to rescue stranded people and distribute much needed assistance throughout the affected regions. I am also grateful that other nations and the UN have also come forward to offer various forms of emergency aid and humanitarian relief.

In times of such crisis and grief one needs more than physical food and nourishment, and the churches, as neighbours in the communities, are there to provide comfort and counsel, hospitality and hope, strength and solidarity. The WCC is encouraging its member churches to pray for the people of Pakistan so their mourning may be turned into gladness, that God will "give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow." (Jeremiah 31:13)

Already the Diocese of Peshawar of the Church of Pakistan has launched its emergency Relief and Rescue Programme. Be assured that the member churches of the WCC and its humanitarian partners such as ACT Alliance are ready to assist and stand by you in bringing emergency and relief assistance for the people of Pakistan.

I pray that God's good grace and wisdom will empower and strengthen you as you continue to lead the people of Pakistan through these difficult times.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Minute of the of the WCC executive committee on the current situation in Pakistan, Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010**

1. Pakistan currently faces a serious human crisis as the result of heavy floods. More than 17 million people have been uprooted and rendered homeless. More than twenty percent of Pakistan's agricultural land has been flooded, damaging all crops in an amount greater than the damage of the 2004 tsunami and 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.

2. The United Nations and Government of Pakistan have estimated the loss to be equivalent to $15 billion. It has been reported that the support received as of 16 September was no more than one billion U.S. dollars.

3. The WCC encourages its member churches to actively participate in supporting the humanitarian need of the people through their work with the respective churches or the development agencies.

4. It is noted that religious discrimination due to the abuse and misuse of the blasphemy laws continue to remain a reality, resulting in the recent murder of two Christian pastors. The WCC general secretary has already brought this to the attention to the president and prime minister of Pakistan.

5. The recent plan by a U.S. pastor to burn the Quran was denounced by the WCC and churches worldwide. We consider even the threat of this act contrary to the principles and teaching of the Christian faith. It has resulted in Christians in Pakistan being threatened with attack and damage being done to churches.

6. The WCC regrets the recent destruction of three churches by explosions in the province of Pukhtunkhawa on 11 and 12 September 2010.

Therefore, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010:

A. ***Reiterates*** its expression of solidarity and support to the humanitarian needs of the displaced people of Pakistan due to the floods;

B. ***Reminds*** WCC member churches and related agencies to continue to respond to the urgent humanitarian situation;

C. ***Urges*** political and religious leaders of Pakistan to continue making efforts to prevent the abuse and misuse of the blasphemy laws, promoting an environment of peace, trust and justice;

D. ***Requests*** churches in Europe and the United States to impress upon their members and societies to avoid hurtful religious sentiments of other faith communities, and in this particular case that of Islam.

- **Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to Pakistan's Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani regarding the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Pakistan government Minister for Minority Affairs, 2 March 2011**

Your Excellency,

It is with great shock and dismay that we received news of the assassination of Mr Shahbaz Bhatti, minister for Minority Affairs in the government of Pakistan. We are deeply concerned by this heinous and outrageous crime directed against a member of your federal cabinet.

We understand that Mr Shahbaz Bhatti was assassinated by religious extremists because he was critical of the controversial blasphemy law in Pakistan. We have been informed by our member constituencies in Pakistan that Mr Bhatti was a man of courage and conviction who had recently stated that he was ready to sacrifice his life for the principled stand he had taken "because the people of Pakistan are being victimized under the pretence of the blasphemy law". It was while Mr Bhatti was openly advocating amending the blasphemy law that he was assassinated by extremist forces.

We condemn the deplorable killing of a lawmaker of the country, and we also are concerned about the vulnerable situation in which Pakistan's minority communities are living. Once again this act demonstrates that the extremists will stop at nothing in their desperate attempt to force religious extremism and violence on Pakistani society. We are of the opinion that terrorist activities in any form or manifestation pose a serious threat to peace and security in any society. Violence and terror are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of motivation.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches has followed with great concern the use and misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan as well as persecution of the religious minorities in the country.

We urge the government of Pakistan to take all necessary measures to provide safety and security to the Christian minority in Pakistan, and other minorities, and not to be deterred by the violent crimes committed by religious extremists.

The World Council of Churches calls upon Your Excellency's government swiftly to undertake the investigation necessary to identify the assassins and bring all who are responsible for this brutal murder to a court of law.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Visit of the WCC general secretary to Pakistan, calling for protection of minorities, 8-10 October 2011**

  During his recent visit to Pakistan, the World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit urged for the protection of religious minorities and the need for the state to take necessary measures against religious intolerance.

  "The Pakistani government should not turn a blind eye to the culture of violence perpetrated through the use and abuse of the blasphemy law, which intensify communal hatred, intolerance and persecution that can hit anybody in the country, and particularly the religious minorities," said Tveit, who was speaking at a press conference in Lahore, at the end of his three day visit.

  Christians are among country's religious minorities including Hindus, Ahmadis, Parsees, Sikh and Baha'is, affected severely by the discriminatory laws, including the ambiguous blasphemy law 295 C, which has caused many lives, including of the minister for minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, this year.

  During his stay in Pakistan, Tveit met with church and ecumenical leaders and representatives of civil society organizations. The church leaders shared with him how religious minorities especially, "Christians live in an atmosphere of insecurity. The existences of Christians have never been threatened as it is today, and the situation has gone worse in the past years," Tveit was told.

  Tveit emphasized, "Pakistan should give protection to every citizen, also its religious minorities under the constitution of the country," recalling assurance given to the religious minorities from the founder of the country Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who clearly stated, "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this state of Pakistan," in 1947 after the country's independence.

  Tveit was accompanied by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, who described this visit as "timely solidarity expression since the Christian minorities are fearful of the violence which is a threat to the interfaith harmony and peaceful co-existence."

  From 8 – 10 October, Tveit addressed an ecumenical gathering at the headquarters of the National Christian Council of Pakistan, met with national executive committee of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, attended a public reception organized by the Synod of the Church of Pakistan and the Raiwind Diocese, and participated at the dedication of the Central Cathedral of Praying Hands in Lahore. In his greetings he quoted Psalm 85: "Righteousness will look down from the sky." Tveit also delivered a keynote address at a mission conference on the theme, "Finding God in a challenging and difficult situation", organized by the Church of Pakistan.

- **Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages in Pakistan; Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012**

Despite the fact that Pakistan was created 67 years ago with a pledge of equal rights for all its religious minorities, today the minority religious communities in the country are facing serious threats to their existence. Pakistan's Father of the Nation, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, laid down the "foundations of a modern, tolerant and progressive Pakistan". He had promised to create a secular and liberal country where all religions could co-exist without any discrimination. The preamble to the constitution of Pakistan guarantees that adequate provision shall be made for minorities to freely profess and practice their religions and develop their culture. Article 25 (1) of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 states that "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law". But a gradual Islamization has been taking place in the country since the martial law regime of General Ziaul Haq who introduced enforcement of the controversial blasphemy law in the 1980s.

Persecution and discrimination against religious minorities has forced more and more Hindus and Christians to abandon their religions and convert to Islam. Today, a significant number of young women of religious minorities, especially Hindus and Christians who live in Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan provinces, face violence, including sexual assault, including rape, threats, and persecution. These minority communities are living in a state of fear and terror due to the rising incidence of abduction of young girls and their forced conversion to Islam. The victims of these forced conversions are often girls from poor backgrounds and are unable to defend themselves against extremists because their community is deprived, defenceless and marginalized.

When young Christian and Hindu women are abducted, kept in confinement, converted to Islam and forced to marry Muslim men, the political authorities seem to be powerless to stop the Islamist fundamentalist forces that are responsible for these heinous acts and that are freely operating in the country. Although Christian and Hindu leaders and members of their religious communities have constantly challenged the government of Pakistan about the continued abduction and forceful conversions of young women, their voices have been ignored. This lack of protection of religious minorities by the government of Pakistan is unacceptable.

Expressing deep concern on the plight of religious minorities in Pakistan, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012:

A. Calls on the government of Pakistan to ensure adequate protection mechanisms for all religious minorities in the country;

B. Urges the government of Pakistan to take immediate action to prevent the abduction, forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage of young women from minority religious communities and to bring to justice all those who engage or have engaged in these heinous crimes;

C. Requests the governments and other international civil society organizations, interfaith groups, and Churches to exert continued pressure on the government of Pakistan to prevent the abductions, forced conversion to Islam and forced marriages of young women from religious minorities.

- **Communiqué from public hearing on the "Misuse of blasphemy law and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan", organized by the WCC/CCIA, 19 September 2012**

1. We believe that the role of religion is to create a climate of peace, stability, tolerance, reconciliation and respect for human dignity and the human rights of all people and not to promote conditions that create intolerance and hatred. The core values of all religions teach values of justice, peace, reconciliation, equality and human dignity. The adherents and leaders of all religions have the moral responsibility to promote and protect peace with justice and human dignity.

2. The international hearing on the "Misuse of the blasphemy law and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan", organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 17 to 19 September 2012, was attended by about 100 participants from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America, including 23 representatives of Christian, Muslim and Hindu religious groups and civil society and human rights organizations from different parts of Pakistan. The hearing provided opportunities for participants to listen, analyze and understand the complex situation of the rise of religious fundamentalism and extremism and the misuse of the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan which leads to blatant violations of human rights.

3. Recalling the assurances given to the religious minorities by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation, that "all citizens are equal regardless of belief", and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion", we, the participants of the international hearing, express great concern and regret that the minority religious communities in Pakistan today have become a target of discrimination and attacks and are facing violations of fundamental human rights. While we recognize that in many communities Muslims and minority religions live in harmony, the blasphemy law nevertheless has become a source of victimization and persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan.

4. During our three days of deliberations at the hearing – plenary presentations, panel discussion at a side event during the 21st session of the United Nation's Human Rights Council, open hearing and workshop sessions – we heard examples of the alarming trend of misuse of the blasphemy law and its impacts. Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees freedom of religion as a fundamental right stating that "every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion" and article 36 stipulates the protection of minorities in that "the state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities".

However, these constitutional guarantees are being negated. Pakistan society has been experiencing militarization and politicization of religion, which has led to abuse of religion for political gains, which in turn results in violations of fundamental human rights of minority religions in Pakistan. Religious minorities in the country have been living in a state of fear and terror as the blasphemy law has been used to register false cases against religious minorities. The increasing trend of the misuse of the blasphemy law intensifies communal hatred, religious intolerance and persecution against religious minorities in Pakistan. The law is often being used as a tool to settle personal scores through attacks on religious minorities. These incidents have fostered a climate of religiously motivated violence and persecution in several parts of the country.

5. General Zia Ul Haq introduced a number of amendments to the Pakistan Penal Code in the 1980s. Its Chapter XV deals with offences relating to religion, including sections 295 to 298. The Blasphemy Law, vaguely formulated and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary, has become one of the most stringent laws in the country. The law itself provides only a vague definition of blasphemy, yet blasphemy carries a mandatory death sentence in some cases, specifically Section 295C. The blasphemy law has been used in recent years to victimize minority religious communities in the country. The participants further regretted the fact that a large number of Muslims have also suffered under and been vulnerable to this law.

6. There are also serious flaws in the presumptions, intent and the content of the Blasphemy Law. Since the mandatory death sentence was introduced, as a result of a Federal Shariat Court interpretation to Section 295C in 1990, many innocent people have lost their lives. The common experience of abusing and misusing the blasphemy law in Pakistan has led to physical violence, damage, destruction of properties and loss of life among innocent people over the years. In recent times, the number of victims has been increasing. Many victims of the blasphemy law have faced displacement or been forced to live in hiding. Charges brought against individuals under the blasphemy law were malicious, stemming from personal enmity, often with the motivation to have people imprisoned to gain advantage in business or land disputes.

7. We express deep concern that the judiciary in the country also faces threats, intimidation and pressure, specifically while dealing with blasphemy cases. As a result of this, the lower courts have often been constrained to convict persons without proper evidence placed before them. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain a fair hearing for those charged under the blasphemy law. On the testimony of a complainant, a person charged with blasphemy is immediately placed in detention. Under the provisions of the present law, the element of intent is not a consideration.

8. In this context, we the participants of the international hearing urge the Government of Pakistan to take realistic and solid steps to stop abuse of the blasphemy law that are causing massive human rights violations. Tinkering with procedural amendments has not delivered; it has failed to mitigate extremely sad consequences of a law that is inherently susceptible to abuse. Therefore, we urge the government to constitute a competent inquiry commission immediately to look into the tragic consequences of the blasphemy law and suggest a way out of this difficult and embarrassing situation. The participants affirmed the need for the civil society to help the Commission in its deliberations, monitor its progress and keep the communities informed.

- **Letter of concern to WCC member churches and the National Council of Churches in Pakistan regarding attacks on Christian minorities, 12 March 2013**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has received with great distress the news of the attack against Christians by a Muslim mob who burned more than 170 houses owned by members of the Christian minority community in the BadamiBagh area of Lahore.

This is part of a series of attacks targeted against Christian minority communities in different parts of the country. These attacks have caused unimaginable human suffering. We share the pain of hundreds of innocent families who have become victims of atrocious acts, and we deplore such actions.

We view this targeting of Christians within the context of Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws, frequently used to persecute religious minorities or settle personal disputes. Social persecution, discrimination and violence against religious minorities have become particularly widespread in Punjab province. These acts of violence and persecution of innocent people from minority Christian communities deserves to be condemned by all peace-loving people in the country.

The WCC is deeply disturbed by the present environment of religious intolerance and religiously linked violence that seems to be growing in Pakistan. In September 2012 the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the WCC organized a public hearing on "Misuse of the Blasphemy Law and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan" in Geneva.

The communique produced by the hearing stated unequivocally: "We believe that the role of religion is to create a climate of peace, stability, tolerance, reconciliation and respect for human dignity and the human rights of all people and not to promote conditions that create intolerance and hatred. The core values of all religions teach values of justice, peace, reconciliation, equality and human dignity. The adherents and leaders of all religions have the moral responsibility to promote and protect peace with justice and human dignity."

It is heartening that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan has taken notice of the attack on Christians and has called on high officials of provincial government to address the concerns of persecuted Christian minorities. However, we are of the opinion that Pakistan's federal and provincial authorities should take a firm decision to undertake actions that introduce effective law enforcement mechanisms to protect all religious minorities.

We request you to convey our deep concern and sympathy for the victims of the wanton attacks upon the BadamiBagh community, and especially for persons who have lost their homes and are living in camps and temporary shelters.

Be assured of our continuous prayers and solidarity with the Christians of the BadamiBagh community in Lahore.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Pakistan on church bombings in Peshawar, 23 September 2013**

"Jesus said… 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'…"
John 11:25-26 (NRSV)

On behalf of the WCC, I wish to express our heartfelt sorrow at the heavy loss of life from the bombing at All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan.

This deliberate targeting of a vulnerable Christian community came at the end of divine worship on Sunday, 22 September and is the single worst loss of life among Christians in Pakistan.

It is particularly tragic given that All Saints Church, Peshawar, one of the oldest Christian churches in Pakistan, witnesses by the building's very resemblance to traditional Islamic architecture to the desire of the Christians of Pakistan to live peacefully with their Muslim neighbours and fellow citizens.

Last week in the World Council of Churches we organized a consultation on the "Politicization of religion and the rights of religious minorities" during which we heard a speaker from Pakistan describe the ongoing difficulties of the Christian community there.

It has deeply saddened us to receive the news of this terrible attack.We express our sympathy for all who have been bereaved, our prayers for those who have been injured, and we commemorate in prayer those whose lives have been lost.

We commit ourselves anew to working for the well-being of the Christian community in Pakistan, and express our solidarity with the community at this time of grief. We call for an end to the wanton violence that has been perpetrated and ask the government of Pakistan to protect all of its citizens from those who are bent on dividing the country and causing suffering to the innocent.

In the name of Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Open letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, prime minister of Pakistan regarding a recent series of bomb attacks, 3 October 2013**

Your Excellency,

It is with profound distress that we received the news of the three suicide bomb attacks and deadly bomb blasts in Peshawar within a week. First in this series of attacks, a suicide blast in a heritage church killed 85 Christian worshippers on Sunday 22 September, five days later on Friday, 27 September 19 people died when a bus bomb targeted government employees returning home, and the latest on 29 September a bomb blast that ripped through a market in the same city of Peshawar killed more than 40 people. In all these attacks, precious innocent lives have been lost. The World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by the present environment of growing terrorism and religious rage and intolerance in Pakistan that has given rise to such attacks.

The World Council of Churches has expressed its serious concern about the safety and security of the religious minorities in Pakistan in the highly charged situation of growing religious extremism. During my visit to Pakistan in October 2011, I had opportunities to listen to stories of the plight of Christians in Pakistan and also to understand the fear of religious minorities in the country who have been living amidst insecurity and lack of adequate protection.

The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned by these acts of terror. By expressing our strong condemnation of these acts of terrorism, we express our sincere condolences to and sympathy, especially to the families of those who were killed and injured. We hold all people of Pakistan in our thoughts and prayers.

Your Excellency, we are aware of the difficulties faced by the people of Pakistan and your government as a result of the continuous bombings and growing terrorist activities that have resulted in an increasing number of civilian casualties. We urge your Excellency that all necessary measures be undertaken to provide safety and security of the vulnerable communities, especially the religious communities who are facing constant threat to their lives.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

People's Republic of China

- **Public message from WCC general secretary regarding the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2010 to Liu Xiaobo, 14 October 2010**

In a message concerning the recent awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, World Council of Churches general secretary, said the prize this year shows a strong message of support to all those around the world who are struggling for freedom, development and the dignity of all human beings.

"It is heartening that Liu Xiaobo has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2010. I consider this recognition of Liu Xiaobo to be an affirmation and acknowledgement of growing respect for human dignity and freedom around the world. It also signifies and underscores the essential parameters that are needed to ensure development, peace and reconciliation among peoples and nations.

Another Nobel laureate, Dr Amartya Sen, once described 'development as freedom' and 'a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy'. Those societies that commit themselves to human dignity make the possibilities of development and fullness of life available to all.

In order to achieve this potential, the human dignity of each individual should be protected. Christian faith respects the dignity of each person created in the image of God. Such core values are embodied in other religious traditions as well as in secular philosophies. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo is a strong message of support to all those around the world who are struggling for freedom, development and the dignity of all human beings. It reminds all of us that each one of us is called to contribute to the common wisdom and understanding of what we need as humanity."

- **Message from WCC general secretary on the 25th anniversary of Amity Foundation, 5 November 2010**

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the Amity Foundation, I take this opportunity to greet you all and express my deep appreciation for the successful ministry of the Amity Foundation for the wellbeing of the people and communities in the People's Republic of China.

Established in 1985, by a group of committed Chinese Christians, the Amity Foundation accomplished a great deal and provided numerous services to the people and communities in China over the past 25 years. The founding of the Amity Foundation was a venture in faith. It was also a clear response of Christian witness to the policies of openness and reform in socialist China. The Amity Foundation anchored its motto in the cardinal values and principles – love and the power of love to contribute to the wellbeing of people at large in society.

Over the years this value, promoted by the Chinese Christians, was appreciated by many not only within China, but also among people and churches in other countries. I am aware that the wide range of activities undertaken by the Amity Foundation, spreading from eastern China to the greater Southwest and to the poverty-stricken and minority areas of the inner reaches of the Northwest, have had significant impact during the past years. These efforts are truly commendable and provides an opportunity to bring the churches living within a socialist political structure closer to society, which helps society at large to understand the concept and values of Christian witness.

The World Council of Churches has accompanied the Amity Foundation during the past years, especially in taking a leading role in coordinating and facilitating the ecumenical sharing of resources within the ecumenical family. It has been WCC's privilege and commitment to accompany the people of the People's Republic of China in their need. This visible expression of the accompaniment ministry of WCC has been in partnership with the church in China and its special ministry through the Amity Foundation.

As the Amity Foundation completes quarter of a century of its service and enters into a new era in its history, I wish you God's richest blessings. May God almighty continue to bless the People's Republic of China.

Yours in His Service,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Message from WCC general secretary to the China Christian Council in tribute to Bishop K.H. Ting, 23 November 2012**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the demise of Bishop K.H Ting, the great church leader in modern China. Bishop Ting worked through the last, often difficult, 60 years of changes in China. As a true follower of Christ, he served the church and the ecumenical

movement in various capacities. He was on the staff of the World Student Christian Federation in Geneva in the early 1950s and closely associated with the pioneering ecumenical leaders who were in the leadership of the WCC in its formative years. His contributions to the Chinese church for more than six decades in various capacities as the Principal of Nanjing Union Seminary for five decades, president of the Three Self Patriotic Movement, and the president of the China Christian Council will be greatly remembered.

Bishop Ting's contribution to the re-emergence of church life and the opening of the church to the outside world in the 1980s and 1990s is widely recognized. He contributed immensely to raise the profile of the Chinese church to the horizon through the creation of the China Christian Council through which the church in China re-entered into WCC fellowship after four decades of absence in the global ecumenical movement.

He was a great visionary who demonstrated his commitment to address reconciliation between church and society, Christian and non-Christian, China and reestablishing the Chinese church's links with the worldwide churches. He made a unique contribution to create an indigenous Christian theology in China, sensitive to the Chinese context, through his efforts of "reconstruction of Chinese theology".

As vice-chairman of the Chinese Political Consultative Committee of the People's Republic of China, Bishop Ting played an important role in ensuring that Chinese Christianity continues to survive and grow even under the communist regime. His pragmatic approach of developing a working relationship between the Chinese churches and the communist regime in China was later proved as inevitable when Christianity in China had to strive hard to keep a balance

between political and religious demands, to develop a sense of dignity during the difficult time of the communist rule. He guided the church in China and found a space for the church in its witness and mission. The founding of the Amity Foundation and the Amity Bible printing company are examples of his farsightedness in demonstrating the witness and mission of the church in modern China.

I take this opportunity to pay our respectful homage to Bishop K.H.Ting and thank God for the life and witness of this servant of God, a true follower of Christ, who believed and propagated a motto that "Love Never Ends".

While joining the numerous friends and associates of Bishop K.H Ting and the China Christian Council around the world, on behalf of the WCC, I express our sincere condolences to the China Christian Council and the members of his bereaved family.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

cc Amity Foundation

Philippines

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the president of the Philippines, Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, expressing deep concern over the arrest of Dr Alex Montes and 42 other health workers, 11 February 2010**

Your Excellency,

It is with deep concern that the World Council of Churches (WCC) received a report of the arrest of Dr Alex Montes, a church worker for the United Churches of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and official of the Community Medicine Development Foundation as well as 42 other health workers by the Philippines army and the Philippine national police.

I am distressed by the reported news that the detainees have been subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment mounting to torture and that they have been deprived of their basic human rights while in custody. Dr Alex Montes, a committed church worker has been a long-time staff of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, which is a member of the WCC world-wide fellowship of churches. The WCC has a strong association with the UCCP and its leadership and in that capacity I am familiar with the activities of the church. Dr Montes who served as the Coordinator of the Health Mission of the Christian Witness and Service programme of the UCCP was instrumental in developing community-based health programmes of the UCCP Visayas Community Medical Center in Cebu City. It is therefore more than unfortunate that Dr Alex Montes and his coworkers were arrested and detained while they were involved in legitimate activities of humanitarian services as part of their Christian witness.

In these circumstances, Your Excellency, the WCC calls for the respect of the human rights of Dr Alex Montes and the 42 other detained health workers, including their rights to legal counsel, access to visitors, and due process, as guaranteed by the Philippines constitution and international human rights instruments to which the Philippines is a signatory. I urge the authorities to ensure the immediate release of Dr Montes and his co-workers.

Yours faithfully,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

cc: Atty. Agnes Devanadera, secretary, Department of Justice
HE Norberto Gonzales, secretary, Department of National Defense
Atty. Leila De Lima, chairperson, Commission on Human Rights
Bishop Eliezer M. Pascua, general secretary, UCCP
Gen. Avelino Razon, Ret. PNP, presidential adviser on the Peace Process

- **Joint oral intervention made at UNHCR's fourteenth session expressing concern at the continuing human rights violations in the country, 8 June 2010**

Thank you, Mr President,

This is a joint statement of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, the American Association of Jurists, the World Council of Churches, Franciscans International, Lawyers Rights Watch of Canada, the American Indian Treaty Council and a Philippine NGO under the Ecumenical Voice for Peace and Human Rights.

We thank Professor Philip Alston for his trail-blazing efforts into the issues of extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. His report and recommendations on the Philippines in 2008 as well as his report to this 14th Session are outstanding pieces of work that human rights advocates and defenders in the Philippines find very instructive and helpful.

Mr President, today the human rights watchdog in the Philippines, KARAPATAN has documented 1,192 cases of extrajudicial killings since 2001. The latest victim is Mr Mike Rivera, who was a former city government official and was a known anti-mining advocate. He was gunned down on May 16, 2010 while on his way to church in a region south of Manila.

KARAPATAN has also documented 205 cases of enforced disappearances and 1,028 cases of torture and hundreds more of other cases of various human rights violations in the different parts of the country, victimizing farmers, workers, Indigenous Peoples, social activists, religious, lawyers and journalists. The most recent highlighted cases of the Maguindanao massacre in November last year and the illegal arrest and continued detention of 43 health workers in February of this year have pointed to the involvement of state security forces. Never since the martial law years have human rights violations in our country occurred with so much impunity as now.

Mr President, the Philippines has just gone through a national election. The presumptive president-elect has campaigned on a platform of prosecuting the perpetrators of these human rights violations.

We urge this Council to help us make the presumptive president-elect stand by his campaign promise. We appeal to this Council to urge our government to stop Operation Bantay Laya, or Operation Freedom Watch or OBL as an anti-insurgency policy. OBL makes no distinction between armed combatants and civilians. Its continued implementation has caused massive human rights violations whose victims cut across all sectors in Philippine society. May this Council be steadfast in urging our government neither to engage in nor adopt any similar policy in the future.

Finally, we urge this Council to continue helping us monitor our government, that it may abide by its pledges and commitments to international instrumentalities and to implement the recommendations that it has accepted and committed to.

Thank you, Mr President.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. President Benigno Aquino III, president of the Philippines denouncing the continuing human rights violations in the country, 30 June 2010**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches (WCC) joins the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) in denouncing the extra-judicial killings of Mr Benjamin Bayles in Negros Occidental and Mr Jovelito Agustin in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. Both victims were active lay ministers, known in their churches as outspoken advocates of human dignity and of the rights of the most marginalized. Bayles was a human rights advocate, involved with peasants' and workers' organizations, while Agustin was a broadcaster actively engaged in assisting victims of illegal recruitment and defending workers' rights.

We are deeply concerned by the ongoing extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances and continuing impunity in the Philippines that have caused the lives of many civilians who raise their voices denouncing human rights violations and asking for justice and lasting peace. Lay people and clergy have not been spared from this violence. These practices are directly against the principles of democracy, the Philippine Constitution and International Conventions, to which Philippines is a party.

It is for these reasons, Your Excellency, that the World Council of Churches would like to urge the Philippines government to keep its commitment to international human rights instruments and put an end to the killings and to the culture of impunity by prosecuting the perpetrators and granting justice to the victims of human rights violations committed in the country.

It is a tragedy that lives have been taken and cannot be restored. For you and your ministers now to ensure that the killings cease would send a welcome signal to your people and to the international community about the standards that the new government will pursue. Our prayer is that the rule of law will prevail in the Philippines and that your government will become known for building peace and establishing justice.

Yours faithfully,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement by Living Letters delegation to the Philippines, 4 December 2010**

"Living letters" (2 Corinthians 3:3) is a symbol of the living Church which we represent by coming together under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and at the kind invitation of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP).

When asked by the disciples where He lived, Jesus answered, "Come and see" (John 1:39), then He commanded John, "write down what you see and send a letter to the churches" (Revelations 1:12). Every visit is a revelation when the knower and the known become one.

This visit has been an opportunity for us to come and see: to see a culture, to see a people, to see a church, to see concerns, turmoil and hopes. First we were warmly welcomed by the general secretary of the NCCP, Rev. Rex Reyes. With hospitality and assistance from him and his colleagues, we saw and heard the heart-breaking stories of victims of human rights abuses and their family members. We saw and felt the pain of those who have lost loved ones by extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detentions, torture and enforced disappearances.

We saw, heard and felt the pain of the farmers in Hacienda Luisita in their struggle for just labour conditions and decent livelihoods, which have been denied to them as a result of land grabbing and unfair labour practices. We call for the immediate implementation of the decisions of the Presidential Agrarian Reform Council to distribute the land to the farmers.

We saw and heard about the presence of local and foreign military personnel in Hacienda Luisita and in other parts of the country, posing a threat to the local communities. We call upon the Philippine government to repeal the Visiting Forces Agreement and withdraw all military presence from civilian communities.

We particularly saw and heard the pain, spirit and courage of the 43 health workers and their families. We question the legality of their arrest and continued detention, as do some officials of the country including the president. We strongly urge their immediate and unconditional release.

We saw, heard and rejoice in the resolve of the secretary of the Department of Justice to have the charges against the 43 health workers withdrawn by 10 December, United Nations International Human Rights Day and if not by then, at least before Christmas. We also rejoice in her recognition of the existence of a culture of impunity that has resulted in extra-judicial killings and massive human rights violations, and her resolve to put an end to it. We affirm her belief that there is no inconsistency between human rights and justice; when you serve one, you serve the other.

We saw and heard the desire of all Christian denominations, faith communities, social movements and all people of good will to unite together to recognize and promote the inherent value of life and human dignity.

We saw and heard deep hopes that the president will keep his electoral promises to put an end to impunity with regard to extrajudicial killings, disappearances and abductions, implement genuine land reform, work toward reconciliation with justice and peace, and live up to his expressed commitment to give top priority to the peace negotiations.

We write to the people of other nations to express solidarity with the Filipino people and express their concerns to the international bodies, the Philippine president, the Department of Justice and the Department of Foreign Affairs. We write to the people of the Philippines with gratitude and admiration for your courage and your hope for just and lasting peace.

May the Baby Jesus make us all Living Letters to prepare His Way by committing ourselves to prayer and action.

Glory to God and Peace on Earth.
(Luke 2:14)

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. President Benigno Aquino III, president of the Philippines expressing appreciation at his decision to release the 43 health professionals and community health workers and to drop all charges against them, 21 December 2010**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I am writing to express our appreciation for your decision to release the forty-three health professionals and community health workers who were illegally arrested and have been imprisoned since February 6 of this year on suspicion of being cadres of the New Peoples' Army (NPA). We welcome your ordering the Justice Department to withdraw the charges against these detainees. While we consider your action as a commitment and positive gesture by the new government under your leadership to respect and protect human rights and human dignity, we now urge you to order a criminal investigation into allegations of torture and ill-treatment of the detainees while they were under military custody.

The people of the Philippines have been faced with human rights violations for many years due to increased militarization, illegal arrests, detentions and extrajudicial killings. The WCC has called on the Philippine government to end the human rights violations and also to end the military's counter-insurgency operations. The WCC recently sent an international team of church leaders to the Philippines as part of our Living Letters programme of team visits. The members of the international team which visited the Philippines heard numerous stories of human rights violations, especially the impact of counter-insurgency operations such as the Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL). We have also been informed of frequent atrocities committed by militia forces, such as the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs), Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs) and Police Auxiliary, all of whom are alleged to be responsible for blatant violations of human rights.

We are grateful to you for your decision to restore the health workers to their families, communities and daily occupations, and we hope that you will continue to take adequate steps to guarantee the rights and dignity all citizens in the Philippines.

I wish you God's blessings in your ministry of serving your country and people in the coming years.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's (HRC) 16th session on arbitrary arrest and detention in the Philippines, 7 March 2011**

16th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

On Item 4: Human rights situation requiring Council attention, working group on arbitrary detention

I stand before you today to bring to your attention the continuing human rights violation in the Philippines, and the continuous occurrence of arbitrary arrest and detention.

For the period from 2001 to December 2010, there were 2,082 incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention, 2059 of which occurred during the incumbency of President Gloria Arroyo, while 23 occurred during the first six months of President Benigno Aquino III.

To be specific, I will cite the arbitrary arrest and detention of Atty. Remigio Saladero, a labour lawyer, and the forty-three (43) health workers, now popularly known as the Morong 43. In both cases, military and police officers used defective warrants to justify their search and arrest. Upon arrest, they were tortured and held incommunicado, in the case of Atty. Saladero, he was held incommunicado for more than six (6) hours, and the Morong 43 were held incommunicado for six straight days. The trumped charges against both Atty. Saladero and the Morong 43 were eventually dismissed.

The two incidents I narrated exemplify the modus operandi of state forces in dealing with those whom they perceived to be enemies of the state. Those who are fortunate enough not be killed, are arrested and detained on false charges.

The change in government in July 2010 did not lead to any substantial changes in the human rights situation in the Philippines as borne out by the figures. In the case of Morong 43, the Aquino Government allowed them to stay in detention for five (5) more months before it decided to dismiss the trumped up charges against them, and the Morong 43 had to go on hunger strike before the Aquino government made the move.

During the regime of President Arroyo and her counter-insurgency campaign, Oplan Bantay Laya, the Filipino people was pitted against a wolf which devoured anything on its path. Under the Aquino regime and his counter-insurgency campaign, Oplan Bayanihan, the Filipino people is up against a wolf in a sheep's clothing. Yes, indeed, it looks like a sheep, but it is still a wolf, and as ferocious and cruel, if not more ferocious and cruel, as the wolf unleashed during the previous regime.

We appeal then to this Council to compel the Philippine government to honour its commitments under international law, especially its commitments under the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Ephraim B. Cortez
National Union of Peoples' Lawyers
Ecumenical Voice Delegation

- **Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th session on Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, 10 March 2011**

On Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the United Nations special rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

Thank you, Mr President.

My name is Felixberto Calang. I am a Bishop of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente whose clergy and leaders have been victims of killings, harassment, and threats. I am also head of the Barug Katungod Mindanao consortium of human rights defenders and the Initiatives for Peace in Mindanao and a human rights defender whose name had been included in a so-called "Order of Battle" watchlist of the Philippine Armed Forces.

I would like to speak about the violation of the rights of Filipino human rights defenders based on my personal experience and on that of other human rights defenders whom I am associated with. As chairperson of Karapatan in Southern Mindanao during the time of President Arroyo, a billboard listing names of 'communist fronts,' with me topping that list, had been erected in Tagum City reportedly by state forces. A list of "enemies of the state "again included me by name and several other human rights defenders; at least two in that list had become victims of extrajudicial killings – farmer leaders Renato Pecaide in 2007 and Celso Pojas in 2008.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the HRC the case of the Maguindanao massacre of 23 November 2009 where 58 people, including 32 journalists and 2 lawyers, were killed by an alleged warlord political family in Maguindanao province, in Mindanao. Lawyer Concepcion Brizuela, who was with me as fellow member of the board of trustees of the Initiatives for Peace in Mindanao, was one of the victims in that massacre, and her recently-released autopsy report showed that she was brutally shot in the head and twice on other parts of her body. The victims' kin are apprehensive of attempts to bribe witnesses and prosecutors in apparent moves to weaken the ongoing legal case against principal accused Andal Ampatuan Jr, then mayor of the township of Datu Unsay, and lead to the dropping of charges against co-accused Zaldy Ampatuan, the governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, and Andal, Sr, the family patriarch and governor of the province of Maguindanao at the time of the murders. The victims' families complain of the slow pace of the judicial processes while witnesses remain unprotected and some have already been killed.

Of the 1,206 documented cases of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines under the Gloria Macagapal-Arroyo administration, 375 of these were from Mindanao, the region where I come from. The Barug Katungod Mindanao consortium had documented cases of harassments, intimidation, surveillance, and filing of falsified criminal charges against at least 44 human rights defenders in the region from October 2009 to October 2010. We are worried because these incidents are continuing.Mr President, the attacks on human rights defenders especially in Mindanao take various forms and present dire ramifications on the general human rights situation. Human rights defenders are subjected to a systematic vilification campaign, as in the case of lawyer Carlos Isagani Zarate, of the Union of Peoples' Lawyers in Mindanao, who, despite a pending petition for a writ of amparo before the Philippine Supreme Court, had been publicly accused by the Philippine military last month of lawyering for a local armed commander of the New People's Army in Davao City. The killing of Benjamin Bayles, a member of my church, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, on June 14, 2010, who suffered from at least 25 gunshot wounds, and the torture and killing of B'laan indigenous tribal chieftain Rudy Dejos and his son Rody Rick of Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur just recently on February 27, 2011 show that extrajudicial killings, including those of human rights defenders, continue to flourish under the prevailing climate of impunity in the country.

Mr President, we appeal to the Human Rights Council to monitor these outstanding cases of attacks and killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines. We call for international monitoring of the prosecution of the accused in the Maguindanao massacre and for the international community to urge for the adequate protection of witnesses and for a speedy and public trial of the case.
Thank you, Mr President.

- **Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th session on Human Rights Defenders regarding outstanding cases of attacks and extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines, 13 March 2011**

On Item 3: General debate with the United Nations special rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

Thank you, Mr President.
My name is Felixberto Calang, Bishop of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente whose clergy and leaders have been victims of killings, harassment, and threats. I am a human rights defender whose name had been included in the so-called "order of battle" watchlist of the Philippine Armed Forces.

Mr President, the attacks on human rights defenders especially in Mindanao take various forms and present dire ramifications on the general human rights situation. Human rights defenders are subjected to a systematic vilification campaign. During the time of Arroyo, a billboard, listing names of "communist fronts" with me topping the list, had been erected in Tagum City reportedly by state forces. A 2007 list of "enemies of the state "again included my name and several other human rights defenders; at least two in that list had become victims of extra-judicial killings–farmer leaders Renato Pecaide in 2007 and Celso Pojas in 2008. Lawyer Isagani Zarate of the Union of People's Lawyers in Mindanao, had been publicly accused by the Philippine military last month of lawyering for a local commander of the New People's Army in Davao City, despite a pending petition for a Writ of Amparo before the Philippine Supreme Court.

Of the 1,206 documented cases of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines under Mrs Arroyo, 375 of these were from Mindanao. The brutal killing of Benjie Bayles, a member of my church and the torture and killing of B'laan chieftain Rudy Dejos and Rody Rick of Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur show that extrajudicial killings continue under the prevailing climate of impunity in the country. We are worried because these incidents are continuing.

In addition is the case of the Maguindanao massacre of 23 November 2009 where 58 people, including 32 journalists and two lawyers, were killed by an alleged warlord political family in Maguindanao province. Lawyer Concepcion Brizuela, a fellow member of the board of trustees of the Initiatives for Peace in Mindanao, was one of the victims in that massacre. The victims' kin are apprehensive of attempts to bribe witnesses and prosecutors in apparent moves to weaken the ongoing legal case against the powerful Ampatuan family. The victims' families complain of the slow pace of the judicial processes while witnesses remain unprotected and some have already been killed.

Mr President, we appeal to the Council to monitor these outstanding cases of attacks and killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines. We call for international monitoring of the prosecution of the accused in the Maguindanao massacre and for the international community to urge for the adequate protection of witnesses and for a speedy and public trial of the case.

Thank you, Mr President.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Benigno S. Aquino III, president of the Philippines, expressing concern about the continued violations of human rights, harassment, torture and extrajudicial killings, 30 March 2012**

Your Excellency,

I bring you greetings from the World Council of Churches, a worldwide fellowship of 349 member churches from 110 countries, including the Philippines, and representing more than 560 million Christians.

I visited your beautiful country to attend a mission and evangelism event organized by the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism which was hosted by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. This event brought together theologians, mission practitioners and lay people from WCC member churches around the world as well as representatives of the Roman Catholic, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The goal of this event was to forge a new mission statement to guide the work of the WCC in mission and evangelism which will be presented to the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, Korea in 2013. It is our common hope and expectation that this statement will call the church to a more coherent and common expression of God's mission in the world today, bringing renewal and transformation to a broken world bound by the powers of greed and injustice through the service and witness of the church for justice and peace. I believe that all churches and Christians, as disciples of Christ, are called to bear witness to God's authority and God's Kingdom of righteousness that affords the fullness of life for all God's creation.

This conference was deliberately, from our side, placed in Manila as we know how much the churches in your country would contribute to this reflection. Although my time in the Philippines was brief, the interaction with the Christians and churches in the Philippines has instilled in me a firm belief in the power of their witness to Christ and God's Kingdom as well as the hope and compassion this brings to all peoples in the Philippines. I left the Philippines with a deeper understanding and sense of urgency for the many challenges facing the country and a stronger conviction of the positive role that the government and church can play together in lifting up the proud people of the Philippines from their present sufferings.

I am particularly concerned about what I heard about the continued violations of human rights, harassment, torture and extrajudicial killings – even of pastors serving their people in solidarity and Christian witness. Your active initiatives to stop this is particularly requested and needed, following your own commitment made to protect human rights.

I had hoped that I would have an opportunity to meet with you during my stay this past week to discuss how we, the WCC, as a worldwide fellowship of churches, could also work with the church, the people and the government of the Philippines toward this end. Unfortunately, your busy schedule did not allow for such a meeting and time of discussion. Perhaps when I have the pleasure of visiting the Philippines again we will be able to enjoy a time of dialogue.

I appreciate and I express to you my deep respect for the hardworking, loving and praying people of the Philippines, a great example for the whole world, wherever your people are present. As you face the multiple challenges before you as head of state for the Republic of the Philippines, please know that Christians in the Philippines and around the world have been and continue to pray for you. I pray that the grace and love of God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will grant you wisdom and discernment as you strive to discharge your duties.

Sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Oral intervention at the UN Human Rights Council's 21st session regarding the report of the working group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on the Philippines, expressing concern on extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders, 20 September 2012**

Thank you, Mme President,

I am pleased to address you from the perspective of a worldwide faith community the World Council of Churches and its member constituencies in the Philippines under the National Council of Churches in the Philippines in relation to the outcome of the UPR process. We note that the Philippine report was very selective in its presentation of data. It failed to mention the more essential issues such as: a) the almost nil conviction rate of perpetrators of rights abuses; b) the failure of the government to press charges and arrest suspects; and, c) the continuing effects of its counter-insurgency programme on the people.

According to an audit of 364 cases of extrajudicial killings from 2001, only 1.37% of the 364 extrajudicial killings audited were solved as of August 21, 2011. The perpetrators are not punished. State authorities have yet to arrest several notorious human rights violators among them Maj. General Jovito Palparan who is wanted for the abduction and disappearance of two student activists.

The government of President Benigno Aquino III has not done much to provide justice to victims of human rights violations. Left to go after the perpetrators, human rights victims and their families have filed civil and/or criminal lawsuits against former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and military officers who have been identified by witnesses as the perpetrators of the crimes. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), a member of the World Council of Churches has filed a civil case against former President Arroyo for their pastors and members who have been victims of human rights violations since 2001.

As justice is elusive, we cannot overstate our concern that the climate of impunity still pervades. Extrajudicial killings continue and church people still become victims. In under two

years of the present dispensation, four church people have been victims of extrajudicial killings among the 99 cases documented so far. Two of those killed, Rabenio Sungit on September 5, 2011 and Jimmy Liguyon on March 2, 2012 were indigenous leaders who were also local church leaders of the UCCP. The other two were Italian National Fr. Fausto "Pops" Tentorio, who was killed on October 17, 2011 and Dutch lay missionary Willem Geertman who was slain on July 3, 2012.

These cases were linked with the victims' strong advocacy for a healthy environment, in particular their work for the defence of indigenous communities against mining and other projects. The concern for the growing number of killings among rights defenders, like these church people I mentioned, have been raised in a statement by the Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders and extrajudicial executions last July 9, 2012.

We respectfully request this Council to consider these comments when it decides to adopt the outcome of the review during the plenary.

Thank you Mme. President

- **World Council of Churches voices solidarity with Haiyan victims, 12 November 2013**

Together with all member churches of the fellowship, Christians and people of all faiths around the world, we pause and pray for those who have been affected by this disaster.

While the official death toll is not certain, Philippine officials say the toll could rise to 10,000 lives lost as a result of the storm. Already more than half a million people are homeless and thousands more have been injured.

Through our partner ecumenical organization, ACT Alliance, many WCC member churches from around the world are responding to this unfathomable disaster. And even as rescue, recovery and clean-up proceed, there is the threat of another storm moving toward the region.

We pray for the safety of all involved in the clean-up and rebuilding and for those survivors of the storm who lost loved ones, some in the most dramatic way, where their children or family members were literally swept from their arms.

We recognize in these cataclysmic events that it is most often the poor who suffer and have the most difficult challenge to rebuild their lives with few resources. We call upon aid agencies and governments not to forget the poorest, from whom the little they had has been taken away.

In what is perhaps the largest storm to date in the region, we recognize the reality of changing weather patterns and the increasing intensity of storms, and we pray that all of us will do our part to reverse the warming of the oceans and remember that it is the poor who will suffer first and the most in any weather disaster.

Above all, we look in faith to the comforting presence of God, "our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). And we detect the hand of God in the struggle for life, the help of neighbours, the strength of rescuers, the solidarity of those far away.

Republic of Korea

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the churches and the National Council of Churches in Korea, expressing deep concern for the people of the Korean peninsula following the sinking of the South Korean vessel Cheonan, 3 June 2010**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with deep concern that I write this to you as the people of the Korean peninsula face, yet again, another precarious situation, that is, the recent tragedy of the sinking of the Cheonan in which forty-six sailors lost their lives. We pray that the Lord almighty will console the bereaved families and friends and give them hope and strength to withstand the challenges ahead.

While we join with the people and the churches in South Korea in their national grief, we also share your common concern that the unfolding events have endangered the prospects for peace on the Korean peninsula and also in the entire North East Asia region. The recent events confirm the fears expressed earlier by the World Council of Churches that the Korean peninsula remains a flashpoint in the North East Asia region and has the potential to ignite a major conflagration, unless the international community, especially the six-party talk nations, try to ensure lasting peace on the Korean peninsula.

Experience has shown us that violence can never be the way to settle disputes either on the Korean peninsula or anywhere else. Therefore, the World Council of Churches reiterates its strong condemnation of all sorts of violence.

As you know that the World Council of Churches has been playing a pioneering role in initiating and supporting peace, reconciliation and reunification of the Korean peninsula. In this regard the WCC has been accompanying the Korean churches for more than a quarter of a century, ever since the Tozanso process was initiated by the Churches Commission on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches.

The Tsuen Wan/Hong Kong consultation in 2009 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Tozanso process strongly affirmed that “the gospel of Jesus Christ commits Christians to work against evil, injustice and suffering in all its forms, and to pray and work for God’s justice, peace and unity in the world. The Korean people have suffered for too long from their forced division. They are one people, one culture, one nation, yet they remain divided. Justice demands that they be reunited in peace and in common commitment to one another.”

The World Council of Churches appreciates and commends the role of the Korean churches in their efforts to continue and strengthen their advocacy for a peaceful resolution even at this time of crisis. In this context, we welcome the statement of the National Council of Churches in Korea, which calls upon all who wield powers to remember that “even in this difficult time, authorities should not give up an effort of mutual dialogue and of opening a way of reconciliation and co-existence on the Korean peninsula.” We also take this opportunity to reiterate the global ecumenical family’s commitment for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula. As the Tsuen Wan communiqué stated, the need for today is to encourage “the international community to allow space and time for direct negotiations between North

and South Korea towards a lessening of tensions between them and towards peace, reconciliation and reunification." The WCC, as it has in the past, will continue to extend its solidarity to the people of Korea, North and South, and accompany them in their quest for peace, reconciliation and reunification of Korea.

The present situation presents the churches and Christians in Korea with enormous challenges. As the churches in Korea continue to be engaged in a mission of peace and reconciliation, I assure WCC's member constituencies in Korea that the World Council of Churches will continue to pray and accompany you and work together with all of you while you patiently persevere in your struggles for justice, peace, reconciliation and reunification on the Korean peninsula.

May the Prince of Peace further empower and equip us in our journey together.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement of expression of concern on tensions on the Korean Peninsula, issued by WCC general secretary, 24 November 2010**

It is with great concern that we received the news about the escalation of tensions on the Korean peninsula. Yesterday's use of artillery and reports of casualties on Yeonpyeong Island in the Yellow Sea are especially serious examples of incidents that stretch back to 1953 when the Korean War ended, without a ceasefire.

During the past several decades, the World Council of Churches has been engaged in peace and reconciliation efforts on the Korean peninsula. The World Council of Churches' unequivocal position has been that the use of force and military power will not resolve the problems that deprive the Korean people's aspiration for peace and reconciliation. The recent violent incidents also demonstrate once again how the unresolved divisions between the two Korean states pose a serious threat to peace and stability in the region. The whole people of the Korean Peninsula deserve a common future with justice and peace.

In the interests of people in both countries and their neighbours in Northeast Asia, the World Council of Churches urges the authorities in both North and South Korea to refrain from actions that exacerbate the tensions. We pray for God to protect all who live under threat and sporadic violence and all who yearn for peace and good relations between neighbours. We call for the governments of North and South Korea to demonstrate the genuine will to return to peace negotiations that will lead to peaceful co-existence and mutual respect, and to engage in a new process of confidence-building measures at the earliest possible date.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary on the passing away of Dr Kang Moon-Kyu, 18 December 2013**

Dear Prof. Mrs Kang Kim Sook Ja,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the passing away of Dr Kang Moon-Kyu, an outstanding ecumenical leader and a former president of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC joins you all in thanking God for the life and witness of Dr Kang Moon-Kyu and his contribution to church and society.

A lay member of the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK), Dr Kan Moon- Kyu was actively involved in the global ecumenical movement during the past five decades. He served the ecumenical movement in various capacities as the Asia Pacific regional secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, general secretary of the Korean YMCA, general committee member and treasurer of the Christian Conference of Asia, and as a member of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches.

As a member of the CCIA he was actively involved in the planning and preparation of the Tozanso process of the Korean unification and the first international ecumenical conference on peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula organized by WCC in 1984. He was also actively involved in the organization of the WCC-sponsored World Convocation on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) held in Seoul, Korea in 1990.

An ardent advocate of democratization and human rights in Korea, he demonstrated a clear vision on churches' participation in wider social issues. He was instrumental in mobilising humanitarian and development assistance to various Asian countries, especially to North Korea, East Timor, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar. His commitment to justice and peace and inter-Korean reconciliation will long be remembered by churches and ecumenical movement in Asia.

As we mourn his passing away, the WCC recognizes his invaluable contribution to the ecumenical movement and the society at large. On behalf of the WCC, I express our heartfelt condolences. May our Lord console and strengthen you and your family in this difficult time of bereavement.

Blessings and peace.

Yours in his service,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

South Asia

- **South Asia ecumenical forum on peace and security condemns religious intolerance in South Asia and expresses concerns on deteriorating peace and security in several South Asian countries, Delhi, India, 18-19 April 2011**

Opening session
Moderator: Dr Mathews George

Opening prayer was led by Bishop Duleep de Chikera. Welcome and greetings on behalf of the National Council of Churches in India was extended by Bishop Taranath Sagar, president of the NCCI and a member of the WCC central committee.

In his introductory remarks, Dr Mathews George, director of WCC International Affairs, who coordinates the SAEFPS, explained about the developments in the post-SAEPP period. The South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme initiated by the WCC in 2003 was ended last year. As the SAEPP was coming closer to its last phase, the idea of SAEFPS was discussed at the 2009 March meeting held in Bangalore and subsequently, it was launched in November 2009 at the Pegasus Reef, Colombo meeting organized by the WCC in collaboration with SACC and CCA. Several issues related to peace and security in South Asia were identified for ecumenical advocacy at various levels, but it has not been followed up. Mathews George affirmed that in the post-SAEPP South Asian context, WCC considers that the two most prominent concerns are peace and security and hence, the WCC was supportive to initiating the South Asia ecumenical forum for peace and security at the request of the South Asian churches, especially the NCCs, to refocus our priority and joint mission of ecumenical advocacy.

Mathews George explained the objective of the meeting and the proposed agenda. It was agreed that the major foci of the agenda should be identified as "freedom of religion and minority situations in South Asian countries, Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan, peace and security issues, interfaith cooperation, rights of migrant workers, and people-to-people exchanges to strengthen cooperation among South Asian countries and to develop diplomacy at people's levels." It was also suggested that the issue of peace as economic justice needs to be identified for a focused pragmatic involvement of the forum.

Mathews George briefed about his discussion with the United Church of Christ / Disciples of Christ, U.S.A.Executive Secretary Rev. Dr James Vijayakumar about the situation in Bhutan and Dr Vijayakumar's suggestion to discuss the Bhutan NCC's proposal at the Delhi meeting. The members agreed to the proposal and suggested to take up this issue during the Bhutan country situation presentation by NCC Bhutan General Secretary Mr Lahtru.

While recalling the earlier decisions, the composition of the membership of the forum was outlined as follows:

1. Six general secretaries of South Asian NCCs, (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka)
2. Six South Asian NCC women secretaries.
3. Three members of WCC central committee from South Asia (Bishop S. Azariah – Pakistan, Bishop Sagar – India, Rev. Ebenenezer Joseph – Sri Lanka).
4. Three members of CCA general committee from South Asia (Bishop Philip Marandi – India, Mr Joyantha Adhikari – Bangladesh , Dr Roakaya, CCA president- Nepal)
5. Two members of WCC's CCIA Commission from South Asia (Bishop Duleep de Chikera and Mr Joyantha Adhikari).
6. CCA Justice and International Affairs members from South Asia (Ms Vijula Arulanandam, moderator of CCA JIA)
7. Director of WCC International Affairs and executive secretary of CCA International Affairs (Dr Mathews George &Mr Charlie Occampo)

Members present at the meeting

1. Bishop TaranathSagar, WCC central committeemember and NCCI president

2. Bishop Samuel Azariah, WCC central committeemember, Pakistan &moderator of Church of Pakistan
3. Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, WCC central committeemember and NCC Sri Lanka gen. secretary
4. Bishop Philip P Marandih, CCA general committee member & CNI deputy moderator
5. Mr LhatruWangchuk, NCC Bhutan general secretary& CCA gen. committee member
6. Dr K B Rokaya, CCA president& NCC Nepal general secretary
7. Bishop Dulip de Chickera, WCC-CCIA member
8. Mr JoyonthoAdhikari, WCC–CCIA member, and CCA general committee member
9. Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad, NCC India general secretary
10. Ms Rachel Pradhan, NCC India women's secretary
11. Rev. David Anirudho Das, NCC Bangladesh general secretary
12. Ms Vijula Arulanandam, CCA JIA moderator
13. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director WCC International Affairs
14. Rev. Asir Ebenezer, NCC India executive secretary (Facilitator)
15. Rev. Vinod Victor, former coordinator of SAEPP / Church of South India (facilitator)

It was noted that several women members of the forum could not join at the meeting due to various reasons including visa restrictions. For example, NCC Bangladesh and NCC Pakistan women's secretaries were denied visas. Mr Victor Azariah, NCC Pakistan general secretary, also did not get his visa to India. Mathews George informed that Mr Charlie Occampo has not been well and is currently undergoing some medical check-ups in Australia.

Bishop Duleep de Chikera suggested to explore the possibility of strengthening the forum with additional members, but the financial constraints for meetings and travel expenses will be a major hindrance. He mentioned that some years back, the South Asian church leaders could meet only in other events outside Asia, but in recent times Mathews George played a key role in bringing the South Asians together, which helped to address the South Asian issues at this level.

Dr Rokaya also affirmed the need for more South Asian solidarity to address vital issues in our societies; smaller churches in South Asia like Nepal and Bhutan where Christianity is new need support from the big and experienced churches from their neighbouring countries. He said that the very coming together of the South Asians is in itself an achievement, hearing, learning, encouraging and challenging one another. This was not possible before SAEPP was initiated. SAEPP helped this coming together and now this forum could also help us to refocus and reorient.

Country situation updates
Moderator: Bishop Samuel Azariah
The country situation contexts were then shared by respective NCC general secretaries.

Nepal
The Nepal situation is going from bad to worse. Of the many achievements in the last decade, the people's movement that overturned the monarchy and the conversion of the state into a secular republic nation were milestones. But the birthing of the democratic process had not been easy. The peace process culminated in the formation of the 601-member constituent assembly mandated to write the new constitution for Nepal by May 28, 2010 and promulgate it. But strife within the ruling coalition and the inadequacies of managing coalition democracy and alleged international intervention made this a difficult proposition. More than 30 political

parties compete with each other today in Nepal.The Assembly decided to extend its own term, which many believe was illegal and immoral; May 28, 2011 is decided as the new deadline and nothing is expected to happen by then. Civil society movements are now performing the funeral rites of the Constituent Assembly members in a symbolic action. The new government in place now has two-thirds majority that can work on the constitution with ease, but the difference of opinion on many issues has made it impossible. The cabinet is not yet formed. Social insecurity is the order of the day. Shut-downs, abductions and killings are becoming rampant. More than 110 armed groups though small are emerging across the nation and law and order are in disarray. The major issues in Nepal include the presence of two armies and the unresolved issue of their integration. The old Royal Army and the Maoist Army were to be integrated into the Nepal Army with UN monitoring. But this has not happened and over 20,000 Maoists are still in the seven main barracks and about 20 sub-barracks across the nation.

The UN mission has leftNepal. Those recruited by the Maoists as child soldiers have been sent away and are regrouping with small arms, forming a fresh threat since no proper rehabilitation mechanism was in place. The next major issue is the inability to come to terms with the understanding of federalism. The basis of the demarcation of states and the powers to be given are still vague. The third issue in contention is the form of governance that would suit Nepal the best. The Maoists are insisting that there should be no compromise on the concepts of republic, secularism and federalism, but there are forces within that are even mulling the return of monarchy. Corruption is rampant. Criminalization of politics has made mafia groups gain prominence. People are beginning to think that there is no alternative but to return to fighting. There is also an allegation that India has a mysterious foreign policy viz Nepal and that Chinese interests are compounding the international interest in the region. Sub-regional geopolitics is also having a say in the national polity. U.S. interests,especially in relation to their China, India and Tibet policies, is also a matter of concern.

A major issue that the Christians face is government permission for burial grounds for Christians. Though the government has formed a committee to look into the issue, the solution is far from sight. Politically motivated Christian campaigns are becoming a new challenge. Religious intolerance is growing. Hindu groups are orgnizing themselves for establishing a Hindu country. Constitutionally, Nepal is a secular country, but for all practical purposes it is still a Hindu country like in the time of the King. Conversion is still illegal. The country's old army was a Hindu army although it was known as a royal army. A Hindu defence army is being formed by militant Hindu groups.

The mineral wealth and hydroelectric power could be a matter of interest to the sub- regional major powers in Nepal. The role of the Church of Nepal in this context and that of the South Asian churches in being in solidarity with the people's aspiration of Nepal has to be seriously reviewed. The global church must be concerned about the Nepal situation and engaged in global advocacy for Nepal's peace and security. The post-May 28 scene has also to be seen with open eyes and prudent minds and global solidarity sought if the democratization process is not to be derailed by vested interest.

Bhutan

Mr LhatruWangchuk presented an update of the situation in Bhutan. Though democracy technically came to Bhutan in 2008, it is democracy without much freedom. Dissent even leads todisappearances of the dissenting. There are no church buildings in Bhutan yet and this is causing lot of issues with social functions like marriages and sacraments. When Christians

die, there is no place to bury them and the attempts to bury have been creating lot of related hardships and communal tensions. The mainline churches in the South Asian region, especially the Churches in India, do not seem to take an active interest on Bhutan, leaving the NCC Bhutan a regional orphan. When the nation is gradually opening up to legalization of the Christian faith, the urgent need is to have a land bought, a model church built and the NCC Bhutan registered. The capacity-building of Bhutanese Christian leadership must be seen as a major priority and proper theological education must be ensured to check the fundamentalist inroads into Bhutan. It was pointed out in the discussion that followed that the post-denominational church in Bhutan must learn from the mistakes of the older churches of the region;it should learn to be a church with minimum structures and be daring enough to look at new ways of being the church. Negotiations with the government must be strengthened to get the NCC registered. It must be noted that there is a general feeling that the Christians are dividing the Buddhist Bhutanese citizens and subverting Bhutanese culture. This challenge to Christian mission has to be seen in the right perspective. In the changing contexts, the Bhutanese Christians must also start discussions on cremations.

Sri Lanka

Rev. Ebenezer Joseph briefed the group on the ground realities in Sri Lanka. *Time Magazine* voting Mahindra Rajapakshe as the sixth most popular president in the world is a pointer to what is happening in Sri Lanka. Constitutionally, the state is bound to protect Buddhism. The 2600th anniversary of the enlightenment of the Buddha has re-opened the anti-conversion laws discussions. Restrictions are being brought in in the construction of new churches, in marriage registrations, in admissions to schools and even in missionary visas. The aggressive means of evangelism adopted by splinter groups is becoming a major concern. The Christians are being forced to be much too government-dependent and this is achieved through various mechanisms. The rising extremist discourses of Buddhism have even started attacking the interfaith groups. In the 'post-war' scenario, Buddhist self-assertion is a strong reality in the North and the East. Buddhist statues and temples are being built everywhere, creating an uneasy feeling among the Tamils. Rebuilding of statues is being connected with war and freedom. Temples are being destroyed and Buddhist statues 'reinstated'. The minorities are going through a painful period. There is no war and no peace and therefore no discussion on minority issues. The issue of displaced peoples remains a grave one. Taking over of land for tourism and military purposes in a systematic way is actually alienating the minorities from their land. Religious and war- related tourism are really painful to the people who are being made mere objects and show pieces. Militarization is happening all over the country. People believe that for every 25 families, there is a military intelligence officer. Interestingly, the Urban and Rural Development ministries are being handled by the Ministry of Defence and the Army.

The big question of the war crimes during the last days of the war and the commissions on lessons learned and reconciliation is haunting the nation, especially after the release of the UN report indicting the government. Minorities have become a silenced group, leaving everything to fate. Though the LTTE is annihilated, just a handful of people are enough to rekindle the fire if the issues remained unresolved. The present government is playing wisely between India, Pakistan and China and this could have serious repercussions for the future.The relationship with India is strainedby fishing issues and India responding by Sonia attending the Global Tamil Forum. Human Rights are an area of major concern with a fear psychosis gripping the nation. The minorities have lost faith in the UN mechanisms**.** Government is willing to take on the West with support from China. The ordinary man in the street is frustrated and resigned. Human rights must be seen as collective rights. The judiciary itself is

compromised. The attorney general is brought directly under the president. In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that the emphasis on development in post-war Sri Lanka is blurring issues relating the democracy and justice. The media is silenced. The global community including the regional and global churches has a major responsibility for advocacy in Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh

Rev. David Das presented the country situation of Bangladesh. He was of the opinion that under the present dispensation, one can say that the people are secure. Constitutional rights are reestablished and secularism and democracy are visibly seen. The decision of the government to try the inhuman crimes committed by the collaborators with the Pakistan Army in the 1971 war has created ripples and tension among the pro-Islamist communalistic outfits, resulting in social unrest. The Libya uprising and the crises in several nations have resulted in an influx of returnees from diaspora communities, especially the Bangladeshi migrant workers. There are 40,000 migrant workers still stranded in Libya. The India-Bangladesh relationship is improving. But the major challenge that the nation faces is the depletion of natural resources and energy sources. Mixed marriages are becoming a tool wherein many Christians are taken into the fold of Islam. Pro-Islamic militant groups are increasing, religious extremism is growing and they are against minority religions. Militant Islamic groups from Afghanistan and Pakistan are becoming active in the country. Grabbing of minority land is happening and a design of the majority community can easily be seen in this. The lack of proper theological education and the issue with the India visas for studies is a matter of concern. NGOs helped by the Middle East are also instigating religious intolerance and fundamentalism. Another positive aspect is that the Hindus are feeling safer now in Bangladesh. Hindu temples are being reconstructed and the Hindu migration to India is diminishing.

Poverty remains a major area of concern in Bangladesh. Joyantha Adhikari added that aggressive evangelism by overseas groups creates more communal disharmony. Minority Christians are becoming a target of majority-Islam's fundamentalist groups in the country.

Sri Lanka

While presenting the Indian situation, Rev. Asir Ebenezer pointed out that the exposé on corruption tells the story of what is happening in India today, even though the World Cup win showed a lot of glory sides**.** Hindu fundamentalists Saffron and Social Activism India being run as corporate enterprises with the UID assuring consumer information for the market, the dwindling space for dissent and the clampdown on justice movements as was typified in the BinayakSen case, the reworking of the foreign currency regulations and tax codes and the sensationalization of news are major challenges. The discrimination of people based on religion remains a major challenge.

Freedom of religion bills aiming at anti-conversionare being introduced in as many as eight states in India. The governments are meddling with the administration of minority-run institutions and the politically polarized leaders of minority communities are compounding the issue. Human rights are an area of concern in many conflict-affected areas. The National Human Rights Commission is not very active. Though the lower judiciary has been stained, the Supreme Court is still respected. E-governance and the Right to Information Act have brought in a bit of transparency.

The church however is not keen on having a long-term goal or vision to cope with the challenges around them. The churches must also realize that they have a role in the formulation of the foreign policy of India.

Pakistan

Bishop Samuel Azariah gave inputs on the Pakistan situation. Pakistan is now a victim of a lot of circumstantial situations. When justice is denied, it leads to chaos and that's what is happening. The coalition partners in the democratic fabric keep changing and this is affecting governance in a big way. The involvement of religion in governance is a matter of great concern,especially for the minority communities. The Blasphemy Law is drawn onto the streets and people are murdered. The murder of Shahbaz Bhatti is just a symbol. Though a minister, he was shot dead in the street and when the parliament offered a two-minute prayer, there were people who refused to stand. The rise of Islamic militancy is growing. Many young Christian girls are being married into Islamic homes. This is not a question of human rights but of survival. Worship places are being monitored by the police.

The Shia/Sunni conflict is also a matter of grave concern for Pakistan. There is a serious issue with energy and power sources including electricity. Abuse of the Blasphemy Law has increased to the extent of saying to the non Muslims; either accept Islam or face the consequences.

Bishop Azariah said that the WCC must intervene here and speak for the persecuted Christian minorities in Pakistan.He reminded the meeting of what Nelson Mandela had said at the Harare Assembly: "Whatever we achieved in South Africa against Apartheid was achieved because of the WCC. A clear advocacy initiative to be planned by the WCC could create global opinion against the misuse of Blasphemy law in Pakistan. This is our need today."

Presentation on geopolitical situation in South Asia

Moderator: Bishop Taranath Sagar

Dr C. Raja Mohan from the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi gave the keynote presentation on the geopolitics of South Asia with special reference to peace and security.

1. He affirmed that the formation of the modern territorial entity of South Asia was one of the key roots of the continuing conflicts in the region. The boundary lines of the empire were loose and it was the West that brought in the idea of national sovereignty in conjunction with territorial demarcations. The formation of India in 1947 by the British had three basic boundary line concepts. The inner line wherein the British had exercised full sovereignty, second the outer line and third the buffer line that was drawn with neutralized small kingdoms like Siam, Burma, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. The loose arrangements between the inner line and the outer line are a messy and complex situation that India and Pakistan inherited and on its fringes, there have always been roots for conflict.

2. The second issue stems from the partition of the subcontinent. It broke up territories into several frontiers, leaving issues on river waters, ethnic identities and unclear borders. The political partition did not necessarily mean economic borders and the shutting down of borders affected centuries-old trade. The wounds created in Bengal and Punjab because of the division still remain an issue. Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan and the maxim that 'good fences make good neighbours' made the situation yet more complex.

3. The third issue was the influence of the great powers who had stakes in the region. The Russians, Americans, Europeans and Chinese had their strategic interests in the region to be protected.The Cold War between East and the West had a direct consequence on how the India-Pakistan relationship emerged. Pakistan found an ally in the U.S. while the Indians went the Russian way. The China-Russia conflict also had an effect on the sub- continent. The India-China tension is beginning to impact all the nations in the region. In the sixties though, only Nepal was caught in between; now we see this extending to Sri Lanka, Burma and even Bhutan.

4. The fourth issue is the nature of the political systems. At partition, India and Pakistan opted for the democratic way, but in Pakistan and when later Bangladesh evolved, military intervention was an issue to contend with. There was seldom a smooth transition between two democratically elected governments. The present dispensation in Sri Lanka,that could be called a 'muscular democracy', could be another case in point. The nature of the centre-state relationship and the defining of democracy have always been trouble-ridden. The inability to protect minorities always remained a cause of conflict.

5. The fifth issue was the uneven economic development. The benefits of economic development have not perforated into the grassroots or spread across the regions. The tribal and the indigenous people were invariably marginalized from the mainlines of economic growth and the states' failure to provide basic rights and human security has led to several small arms uprisings where the 'people' rose in revolt against the state machinery.

During the discussion that ensued, several pertinent questions were raised. Now that partition cannot be undone, how do we transcend the scars of partition? How do we think of the region as a whole instead of bilateral relationships? How viable is the concept of a regional market and a regional currency in South Asia? How does each nation, especially India, respond to internal conflict in the other countries? How do we envisage free movement of people among the South Asian nations without visa regulations? How do we creatively contribute to peace and security in the region and also globally?

The way forward

The second day's discussions were centered around identifying priorities and more concrete action plans for advocacy at levels. The meeting resumed with a prayer led by Bishop Philip Marandi.

Issues identified for future advocacy engagements

1. Blasphemy law in Pakistan – advocacy strategies and initiatives
   Moderator: Bishop Philip Marandi

Bishop Samuel Azariah gave background information on the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan and how the extremists are using it today to haunt the minorities and to silence dissent. Bishop Azariah mentioned that he was in Geneva the previous week specially to meet and hold discussions with the WCC General SecretaryRev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and also with DrMathews George. Several proposals were made at that time; this needs to be followed up and implemented.

Mathews responded and said that the general secretary had taken all these proposals seriously and had asked Mathews to include these as part of the 2012 programme plans of WCC. This was an indication that Pakistan would not be a forgotten area as far as WCC is concerned, but similar actions by CCA and South Asian churches are needed at other levels.

(i) Advocacy on misuse of blasphemy law is needed at various levels – South Asia, Asia and global levels. South Asian NCCs and churches and civil society need to take up this issues.

(ii) It was decided to publish a detailed booklet explaining what the blasphemy law was, how it is impacting Pakistan and its minorities. This information is needed to sensitize church people in South Asia and also to sue for advocacy in South Asian countries. (WCC will take the lead in coordinating the publication of the booklet).

(iii) WCC advocacy initiatives and engagements in the coming months are expected to reach the goal with following steps:

- WCC general secretary's visit to Pakistan in October 2011
- Possibility of the South Asian church leaders' visit to Pakistan during WCC general secretary's visit and CoP consultation in October
- An international ecumenical team will be sent to Pakistan by WCC before the end of 2011, after the visit of WCC general secretary
- WCC will convene an international consultation/hearing on the Pakistan situation and this will be held in Geneva in conjunction with the UN Human Rights Council session in March 2012.
- A team of five Pakistan church leaders and two Muslim leaders will visit certain European countries prior to the Geneva consultation in March 2012, mainly to meet with government authorities in Europe and also to visit the EU headquarters in Brussels. They will participate at the Geneva consultation.

(iv) The South Asian NCCs will gather opinion in their respective nations and will visit Pakistan embassies and try to pressurize the Pakistan embassies in their respective countries.

(v) It was agreed that the interfaith networks in each nation could also be made use of for this purpose.

2. <u>Freedom of religion in South Asian countries : advocacy initiatives</u>
Moderator: Ms Vijula Arulanandam

The issue of freedom of religion is identified as a major concern in all South Asian countries.

In addition to the minority persecution in Pakistan, all other South Asian countries are also facing the problem of lack of rights and freedom for minority religions to exist and for their adherents to practice their faith as religious fundamentalism and intolerance rise.

It was agreed that the forum should envisage a study and a consultation on Christian self-understanding andreligious intolerance in South Asia.

Questions on becoming a truly local church, the continuing presence of colonial mission strategies, language and culture, the need for an apology for the violence caused to indigenous cultures should be discussed by our best thinkers, theologians and youngsters in the South Asian context.

The WCC and the CCA were requested to organize this meeting in collaboration with the SACC, preferably in Kathmandu between 5-8 December 2011. The crux of the issue is to let the people know of the current misuse of the law.

The anti-conversion bills prevailing in eight states of India were discussed. The issue of attempts to re-hinduise Nepal by Hindu fundamentalists was examined. The issue of burial grounds for Christians in Bhutan and Nepal was also discussed.

- In the context of Nepal where the new constitutions are being drafted, all efforts should be made to push for secular space.
- A national consultation could be envisaged for Bhutan on the sole issue of "burying the dead".
- It was decided to initiate and publish a thorough study on the South Asian constitutional provisions on religious freedom and the way they are being practiced now. Asir Ebenezer, NCC India, was authorized to do this before the end of 2011. Ms Vijulala Arulanandam will also be collaborating in this study process.

It was emphasized that the issue of how wrong or unethical ways of doing mission are contributing to religious intolerance should also be addressed, based on case studies at the grassroot levels.

3. Rights of migrants and migrant workers

The fact that there are a large number of migrants and migrant workers in the Middle East and in Africa from the South Asian countries was noted. Several people are living in camps in adverse climatic conditions in the Gulf countries.Churches in congregations in the Middle East must take a much clearer role in this concern.

- A joint initiative with the Middle East Council of Churches could be mooted.
- Liaison between WCC, CCA, MECC and SACC on addressing the rights of migrant workers and their families from South Asian countries needs to be addressed with an immediate effect.
- A meeting of all the South Asian pastors working in the Middle East could be one very pragmatic first step that could be taken to address this concern. One church leader from each country in South Asia could also be invited.
- WCC and CCA were requested to facilitate this initiative.
- The possibility of governments in South Asia being influenced to be more sensitive to this human need could be explored.

- The SACC leadership meeting the migrants in the Middle East should be probed.
- A model like the Asian Migrant Centre and Filipino Migrant Centre in Hong Kong could be envisaged in the Middle East by the SAEF.
- Issue of human trafficking has become a major issue in South Asian context and this should be addressed strongly in this connection.

4. People-to-people exchanges

South Asian people are isolated communities. Political disputes hinder them from traveling freely or making social contacts with their own people living in neighbouring countries. While politics divide people in South Asia, an important need is to develop more people-to-people contacts. The objectives of the people-to-people exchange could be exposure, solidarity, fact- finding and building relationships.

It was reported that the CNI Diocese of Delhi will be sending a delegation to Pakistan and Pakistan church leaders will visit CSI on the invitation of the CSI moderator

In this context, the following concrete steps were suggested for follow-up:

- A group of church leaders from South Asia to visit Pakistan to coincide with the WCC general secretary's visit between 9th and 11th Oct 2011.
- SAARC countries people-to-people visit to be strengthened. Youth and women teams could visit each others nation^s.
- Special efforts must be made to encourage team visits to and from Bhutan. NCC India could take the lead in organizing a Bhutanese church leaders' meeting in India.

Closing session
It was proposed to hold the next meeting of the South Asia Ecumenical Forum to meet in Pakistan on the 8th of October 2011.

The meeting came to a close with a prayer by Ms Rachel Pradhan and benediction by Bishop Duleep de Chickera.

• Minute on peace and security in South Asia adopted by the WCC executive committee, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-16 September 2011

1. The South Asia region, (comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), continues to be one of the most volatile regions of the world. The negative effects of ongoing ethnic conflicts, civil wars, ethnic cleansing, communal and political violence, persecution against minority religious communities especially against Dalits and Indigenous Peoples, terrorism, counter terrorism, religious extremism, militarization, gross and systematic violation of human rights, unresolved inter-state and intra-state conflicts, and subversive economic interests, etc., are visible today more than ever before in the South Asia region. South Asia has become a hotbed of the war on terror and a victim of the strategic interests of major power blocs keeping the region in constant turmoil and uncertainty. The nature of its volatility and that of the conflicts has been redefined by the

U.S.-led war on terror, wherein the rulers of the region have joined together as partners. This has wider repercussions in the region as resentments against foreign forces in the region are growing among various sectors in society, especially in the context of the recent happenings in Pakistan.

2. There is a feeling among the general public that peace and security in South Asia are defined today in terms of the strategic interests and objectives of countries outside South Asia. Home to one-fifth of the world's population, this region is accountable for fifty percent of the world's illiterate and forty percent of the world's poor. This poverty-stricken region faces innumerable adversities in terms of securing peace, security and development. The extent of human deprivation in the region contrasts with the large armies, modern weapons and increasing defence budgets, arms race and nuclear power struggle which keep the region seething with unrest.

3. The increasing trend of religious intolerance and politicization of religion create havoc in Pakistan, Bangladesh and in India. Although one of the world's bloodiest and longest-running civil wars in Sri Lanka is over, it left parts of the island devastated and hundreds of thousands of people displaced and forced to live in camps. A dysfunctional judiciary and justice system, lack of democratic governance and gross violations of human rights have become pervasive phenomena of Sri Lanka today. Although a new government has been installed recently in Nepal, the Constituent Assembly could not agree upon a new Constitution, and the country is facing a constitutional crisis with political parties failing to reach a consensus; the peace and reconciliation process initiated in the country has been jeopardized.

4. A meeting of the South Asia Ecumenical Forum on Peace and Security (SAEFPS), which was initiated in 2009 by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the South Asian Councils of Churches (SACC) met on 18-19 April 2011 in New Delhi, India. Having analyzed, listened to and realized the seriousness of the situation in various South Asian countries, the SAEFPS made a proposal to the WCC and CCA to be involved in global ecumenical advocacy on peace security in South Asia.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 13 to 16 September 2011, expresses particular concern about the deteriorating situation that threatens the peace and security in South Asian countries. In light of the present situation of increasing hostility and security threats, the executive committee:

A. ***Extends*** support and encouragement to the South Asian churches and National Councils of Churches as they work for peace, security, reconciliation, religious tolerance and justice for all;

B. ***Encourages*** WCC staff to continue to monitor developments in South Asian countries and exchange information;

C. ***Calls*** on WCC member churches to accompany and support the churches in Pakistan in their initiatives to address the issue of the misuse of blasphemy law, especially through their engagement in advocacy at the local, regional and global levels;

D. ***Extends*** support to the Pakistani churches' efforts to promote communal harmony and religious tolerance;

E. ***Calls*** on WCC members churches to be in solidarity with the persecuted religious minorities in India, especially the Dalits and Indigenous Peoples;

F. ***Calls*** on WCC member churches to pray for the people and churches in South Asia.

Thailand

- **Solidarity message to the Church of Christ in Thailand expressing deep sorrow at the upsurge of violence, 19 May 2010**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with a deep sense of sorrow that we receive the news of the continuing upsurge in violence which has led to the deaths of more than thirty people in Bangkok. We grieve with the people of Thailand at this intolerable loss of life and extend our condolences to the families of those that have died, neighbours who are victims of violence in their own right.

We are greatly concerned that certain groups have sought to utilize violence as a means of achieving their political goals. We are alarmed at the use of deadly weapons by individuals and government during the course of this conflict. We urge the leaders of all parties to remember the pain and suffering that the people of Thailand have experienced in the past as a result of such violence manifesting itself in civil conflicts. Violence cannot be the solution. Therefore, we strongly urge a return to negotiations for a peaceful resolution to the current crisis, a process that can still hold out hopes for a resolution to the present situation in spite of the recent obstacles to dialogue.

We also deplore the way in which various forms of media are being used to fuel mistrust and label one's opponents in order to justify one's own political, social or economic agenda. We call upon all parties involved in the present crisis to exercise restraint in actions and words, and particularly to abandon violence as a means of solving problems. In the days ahead there will need to be an open and thorough investigation of the actions taken by all sides so that those who resort to violence are held accountable to the rule of law.

I take this opportunity to express the firm solidarity of the World Council of Churches with the people of Thailand in this time of distress. I commend the Church of Christ in Thailand for their faithful witness to the Prince of Peace during this time of conflict and wish to encourage them to strengthen their work in seeking justice and peace for all.

At the same time I call upon all member churches within the fellowship of the WCC to join in prayers with the churches and Christians in Thailand. We pray that God's spirit of peace will empower Christians and all people as they seek together a peaceful solution to the present violence. We pray for the Spirit of reconciliation to reside in the hearts of all peoples of Thailand so that they can work together to establish a just society in which all, regardless of political allegiance, share the right to enjoy the gift of life in all its fullness. We pray that the Spirit of righteousness will guide the political leaders so that they may seek a long term resolution that adequately addresses the concerns of the people and contributes to the building up of a strong, stable and united society working together for the common good.

As we journey together may the peace of God guard our hearts and minds; and may the God of peace give us peace at all times and in every way.

The Lord be with all of you.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Europe

Armenia

- **Joint message from WCC general secretary and CEC interim general secretary on the occasion of the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, 14 April 2011**

Easter, the glorious Day of Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, falls this year on April 24 which coincides with Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. For the first time since 1915 April 24 falls on Easter Sunday in the Armenian church calendar. It is truly a meaningful coincidence, as the existence of the Armenian nation and people itself is a special sign of the power of the resurrection in a world of death. When Christians all over the world celebrate Easter on the same date this year, it will be an historic opportunity for all of us to pay tribute to the memory of the innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide.

As the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian people observe the 96th year of the Armenian Genocide, the World Council of Churches and the Conference of Churches in Europe appeal to all member churches to commemorate the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide during their prayers and messages on Easter day 2011.

The World Council of Churches has addressed the need for public recognition of the Armenian Genocide. In 1984 the WCC published a document called "Armenia: the continuing tragedy" which helped in making known the history and plight of the Armenian people. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs raised the issue of the Armenian Genocide in the UN Commission on Human Rights with reference to the latter's "Revised and updated report on the question of the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide". As was stated at the 2005 WCC central committee meeting, the WCC believes that, "from the Christian perspective, the path towards justice and reconciliation requires the recognition of the crime committed as a *sine qua non* condition for the healing of memories and the possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting but to look back with the intention to restore justice, the respect for human rights and relationships between perpetrators and victims."

In a public statement of 11 April 2005, the Presidium of the Conference of European Churches joined the World Council of Churches in inviting all its member churches "to make April 24 a Day of Memory of the Armenian Genocide and to consider further appropriate actions related to the 90 years'commemoration of the Armenian Genocide". The CEC presidium further urged "the Turkish government to initiate a process of reconciliation between the Turkish and the Armenian peoples, in which the recognition of guilt and the proclamation of the truth need to be integral elements."

In this spirit, as we approach Easter Sunday this year, we call upon all brothers and sisters of faith in Jesus Christ to join with the Armenian people in offering prayers for Armenians and other victims of genocide.

Let us be reminded of what Christ has said,
"I am the Resurrection and I am the Life.

Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies;
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25).

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita
Interim general secretary
Conference of European Churches

- **Minute on 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

During the year 1915-1916, about 1.5 million Armenians were massacred and thousands more were displaced or deported from the Ottoman Empire in present-day Turkey. The "Armenian diaspora" today, scattered in different parts of the world, represents the greatest effect of the genocide as more than eight million Armenians now live outside Armenia. Even after almost a century, the Armenian Genocide still has serious implications for the Armenian people, as well as the international community. Although most of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide have passed away, the Armenian people continue to demand recognition and reparation for the suffering and injustice inflicted upon their ancestors.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has addressed the issue of the Armenian Genocide in international fora on several occasions. During the 1979 Session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) raised the question of the need for recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the UN. The 6th Assembly of the WCC held in Vancouver, recognized the importance of the need to continue to address the effects of the Armenian Genocide in appropriate contexts. A minute adopted at the Vancouver assembly stated, "The silence of the world community and deliberate efforts to deny even historical facts have been consistent sources of anguish and growing despair to the Armenian people, the Armenian churches and many others." We honour the other 600,000 Christians of Aramean, Chaldean, Assyrian and Greek descent, including Catholics and Protestants, who were also massacred along with their Armenian brothers and sisters. The role of the WCC in "enabling the Armenian churches to speak out and work towards the recognition of the first genocide of the 20th century" was recognized by the Armenian churches over the years.

Prior to the 10th Assembly of the WCC the Armenian churches reminded the WCC general secretary of the historical reality that the 10th Assembly will be held on the threshold of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in 2015. Requests have been made by the leaders of the Armenian churches for the WCC to initiate programmes to observe the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in appropriate ways.

Therefore, the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, requests the general secretary to:

A. ***Organize*** in 2015, around the commemorative 100th anniversary date 24 April 2015, an international conference in Geneva on the recognition of and reparation for the Armenian Genocide with the participation, among others, of WCC member churches, international organizations, jurists, historians and human rights defenders.;

B. ***Organize*** an ecumenical prayer service commemorating the victims of the Armenian Genocide at the Cathedral of Geneva in conjunction with the international conference; and

C. ***Invite*** member churches of the WCC to pray in memory of the Armenian martyrs around the dates of the international conference and also for recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Cyprus

- **Letters from WCC general secretary to H.E. Ms Navanethem Pillay, UN high commissioner for Human Rights and Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, regarding the ceasing of worship/refusing to give permission to hold services at two Christian churches by the Turkish Cypriot police in Cyprus on Christmas day, 28 January 2011**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches would like to express its deepest concern and indignation concerning the events that took place on Christmas day in the village of Rizokarpaso, in the area of the Republic of Cyprus under the control of Turkish troops and administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkish Cypriot police entered the Church of Saint Sinesios and demanded that the worship activities cease. Following this they forced the congregation out and sealed the church. Their argument was that the local Turkish Cypriot authorities had not granted the congregation permission for the service, an accusation that the Church of Cyprus strongly denies. It should be noted that the church is one of seven religious sites in the area which is governed by a special status under which religious services can be performed on a regular basis without receiving advanced permission. Furthermore, the local Turkish Cypriot authorities refused to give permission for the performance of the Holy Service to the Gialousa Saint Trinity Church (Agia Triada) in occupied Karpasia.

We strongly denounce these actions as we believe that they constitute a flagrant violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights, mainly the right to freedom of religion and belief, as guaranteed in a number of international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the Third Vienna Agreement of 1975, concerning among others the safeguard of the right to education and religious freedom of the enclaved Greek Cypriots, living in the northern occupied part of the Republic of Cyprus.

One of the main elements of religious freedom is the right to be able to manifest one's religion or belief in practice and worship. Such actions, as those that occurred on Christmas day, are in direct offence to the core elements of the right to religious freedom and a worrying sign of religious intolerance which can only hamper efforts to bring peace to the divided island. As the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Having full confidence in the work of the United Nations for the respect, protection and promotion of human rights around the world, we urge you, your Excellency, to use your good offices to ensure that the human rights, especially freedom of religion and belief of the enclaved Greek-Cypriots, are fully respected by the Turkish Cypriot authorities.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Archbishop of Cyprus Chryostomos II strongly denouncing the actions of the Turkish Cypriot authorities in stopping the Christmas day service of a church in Rizokarpaso, 28 January 2011**

Your Beatitude,

Following your letter on the deplorable events that took place on Christmas day in Rizokarpaso, I have attached the letter sent by the World Council of Churches to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Navanethem Pillay and to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr Heiner Bielefeldt.

We strongly denounce these actions as we believe that they constitute a flagrant violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights, mainly the right to freedom of religion and belief as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in many other International human rights instruments. The World Council of Churches will never cease to defend religious freedom and stand by those victims who are being persecuted for reasons of their religious beliefs. We believe that, as the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to H.B. Archbishop of Cyprus, denouncing the continued violations of religious freedom and freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the Republic of Cyprus, 20 April 2012**

Your Beatitude,

Christ is Risen!

First of all, allow me to convey to you my cordial Paschal greetings. May the Risen Lord fill our lives with the light, the hope and the joy of His Resurrection!

It is with great concern, your Beatitude, that the World Council of Churches has been informed of the recent events concerning Bishop Christoforos of Karpasia and his placement on the 'stop list' by the occupying regime, forbidding him thus to visit the bishopric and reach his community for the celebration of Easter in the occupied area.

We regret and denounce the continued violations of religious freedom and freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the Republic of Cyprus and the restrictions imposed on his grace Bishop Christoforos of Karpasia. One of the main elements of religious freedom is the right to be able to manifest one's religion or belief in practice and worship. Such actions, as those occurred during Easter, are in direct offence to the core elements of the right to religious freedom and a worrying sign of religious intolerance which can only hamper efforts to bring peace to the divided island.

Despite this deplorable event, the Church of Cyprus has always spoken out against any acts that constitute a violation of the right to religious freedom of all people of Cyprus, irrespective of their religious or national background. It is within this context that I would like to salute and express my appreciation for your exemplary and unequivocal condemnation of the arson against the external canopy of the Koprulu Haci Ibrahim Aga Mosque, in Limassol, in the early hours of the Orthodox Great Saturday. As you have so wisely stated, irrespective of the real motives that lie behind this intolerable act and which are a matter of police investigation, the act itself constitutes an unacceptable disrespect towards a place of worship.

By condemning acts directed against places of worship, be it Christian churches or Muslim mosques, which restrict freedom of religion, the Church of Cyprus is setting a great example and is providing a true witness as a preacher of love, solidarity, peace and reconciliation. As the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states

'inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'.

Please accept, your Beatitude, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration and our firm determination to support your struggle to stand by your community and exercise your right to religious freedom in the occupied territories, but also in your efforts to reduce tensions and build a culture of dialogue and trust between the two sides, which can eventually lead to a long lasting peace in the Republic of Cyprus.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Cyprus, expressing support of the religious track of the Cyprus peace process, 19 March 2013**

Your Beatitude,

Grace and peace from God our Father and our common Lord Jesus Christ, the prince of peace!

The Commission of Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA/WCC), would like to express its support to the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, initiated with the support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus.

The WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) has a long history and tradition of involvement in the struggle for human rights and religious freedom, as well as strengthening and promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation, especially in conflict situations. WCC has been accompanying the people and churches of Cyprus for many years, in their struggle for a peaceful solution to the decades-long occupation that has divided the island.

We are very much aware of the destructive consequences that the political conflict in Cyprus has had on religion and on the right of people to fully exercise their right to religious freedom. Places of worship are desecrated, vandalized or simply neglected, historic cultural heritage sites are under threat of collapse, there is lack of freedom of movement for religious leaders to visit their places of worship, the right of access to places of worship is on many occasions denied or at best heavily controlled.

Against this backdrop, WCC would like to commend the efforts of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process facilitated and coordinated by former CCIA/WCC colleagues, as a hopeful sign for the future. We believe that the interreligious dialogue for human rights, peace and reconciliation is a historic peace-building effort in Cyprus as it has initiated and brought together the religious leaders of the island for an engaged and honest dialogue to contribute to the Cyprus Peace Process.

It is very promising to see that for the first time in the contemporary history of Cyprus in the last 50 years, the heads of three main Christian communities of the island, led by your Beatitude, are meeting with the Mufti of Cyprus discussing peace, human rights and religious freedom in Cyprus, under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus.

We strongly support the Religious Track in its aim to build relationships, understanding and trust between the religious leaders and ultimately the respective faith communities including clergy. We also encourage the special focus given to the participation of youth and women in this process.

It is our strong belief that religious leaders have a responsibility but also a unique role to play in the peace process. Through this process religious leaders can actively be involved in the Cyprus Peace Process, by providing their valuable contributions on issues related to forgiveness and reconciliation, necessary preconditions for a viable peace in the island.

We would thus like to praise your leading role in these efforts and assure you of our long standing commitment and support to all initiatives of interreligious dialogue and cooperation at the level of religious leaders and at the grassroots level, aiming to promote respect of religious freedom of all religious communities in the island.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the UN in Geneva, expressing support of the Religious Track of the Cyprus peace process, 19 March 2013**

Your Excellency,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA/WCC), would like to express its support to the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, initiated with the support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus.

The WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) has a long history and tradition of involvement in the struggle for human rights and religious freedom, as well as strengthening and promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation, especially in conflict situations. WCC has been accompanying the people and churches of Cyprus for many years, in their struggle for a peaceful solution to the decades-long conflict that has divided the island.

The root causes of the political conflict in Cyprus are not religious, nonetheless, religion has fallen victim to this conflict. Places of worship are desecrated, vandalized or simply neglected, historic cultural heritage sites are under threat of collapse, there is lack of freedom of movement for religious leaders to visit their places of worship, the right of access to places of worship is on many occasions denied or at best heavily controlled.

Against this backdrop, WCC would like to highlight the unprecedented efforts of the Religious track of the Cyprus Peace Process facilitated and coordinated by former CCIA/WCC colleagues, as a hopeful sign for the future. The interreligious dialogue for human rights, peace and reconciliation is a historic peace-building effort in Cyprus as it has initiated and brought together the religious leaders of the island for an engaged and honest dialogue to contribute to the Cyprus Peace Process.

The Religious Track aims at building relationships, understanding and trust between the religious leaders and ultimately the respective faith communities including clergy. Special focus is being put on youth and women. Through this process it is hoped that not only the main concerns of the religious communities for the full exercise of the right to religious freedom will be ensured, but that also religious leaders will be actively involved in the Cyprus peace process, by providing their valuable contributions on issues related to forgiveness and reconciliation, necessary preconditions for a viable peace in the island.

For the first time in the contemporary history of Cyprus in the last 50 years the heads of three main Christian communities of the island, led by HB Archbishop Chrysostomos II are meeting with the Mufti of Cyprus discussing peace, human rights and religious freedom in Cyprus, under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus. Through this dialogue, the religious leaders have affirmed their belief and conviction for the respect of freedom of religion, the right for all faithful to access their places of worship and the right to worship itself.

It is our strong belief that religious leaders have a responsibility but also a unique role to play in the peace process and we hope that the Government of Cyprus will support and encourage

efforts like the Religious Track, which aim at promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation both at the level of religious leaders and at the grassroots level.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

European Union

- **Message of congratulations from WCC general secretary to the European Union on being the recipient of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, 12 October 2012**

The World Council of Churches congratulates the European Union and its leaders on the decision of the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award this year's Nobel Peace Prize to the EU. The award is given in recognition of the contributions by the EU and its forerunners "to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe."

After two world wars that killed millions of people and destroyed entire regions, it has been at the heart of the project of the European Union to bring peace and stability to the war-torn continent and establish common legal and democratic standards on the basis of solidarity and mutual accountability. The EU followed these intentions in its brave steps to include more states in Europe and to improve living standards of ordinary people.

Under the crisis-preparedness component of the "Instrument for Stability" (Art 4.3), the European Commission has established peace-building initiatives. The EU's role over the years in responding to crisis situations, especially some of the longer-term security threats, has been widely acknowledged and recognized over the years.

The events of recent years have shown the urgency of not giving up the intentions and values that guided the process so far. At a time when the European Union is confronted with difficult challenges and struggling internally and in its external relations to uphold just and equitable relationships which make for peace, the award is an encouragement to focus on the values of peace, justice and solidarity in the search for a viable and vital future.

We are confident that our member churches in European Union states contribute to the development of the European Union in the spirit of the theme of our forthcoming assembly "God of life, lead us to justice and peace." Together with them, the World Council of Churches conveys its profound appreciation to all those leaders of the EU who were and continue to be committed to struggle for peace and reconciliation and for democracy and human rights in Europe.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Open letter from the general secretaries of the WCC and CEC to the members of the European Union appealing for a just and sustainable solution to the crisis in Greece, 21 November 2012**

Greece: a challenge for the EU as peace-builder

On December 10 the European Union (EU) will be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. As this award is bestowed upon the generation who built a sustainable peace within Europe, the economic and emerging humanitarian tragedy today in Greece challenges the EU as a peace-builder for the next generation.

While the peace award says much about what Europe has become, the response toward Greece will say what Europe will be in the future. Throughout Europe, youth unemployment is increasing rapidly with unprecedented rates in Greece and other countries where more than 50 percent of youth are unemployed with little hope for their future.

Being in Athens today where we met with the Greek government and church leaders, we, the general secretaries of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Conference of European Churches (CEC), appeal to the EU to solve the financial crisis in such a way that it gives urgent and proper attention to the emerging humanitarian crisis in Greece. This will be a challenge for the EU as peace builder.

In Greece, basic human services such as health care and even the availability of medicines are at severe risk. Jobs are increasingly scarce and needed for any development. Greece carries an increasing burden of being the gateway to Europe for many migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

The people of Greece cannot be isolated. It is time for values of understanding and solidarity rather than division and blame. This is an opportunity for the EU to remain true to its founding principles through acts of social and economic justice required for a sustainable peace, so important for Europe and the entire world.

Throughout Europe, the people of Greece are being blamed for this crisis. The responsibility for this situation rests with Greece and the EU and both the lenders and the borrowers. We appeal to the EU that it addresses this not just as a Greek crisis but as a European crisis. Each has responsibility for the role they have played and for the response they give.

European history teaches us that financial crises always have a humanitarian and social dimension which can lead to a political crisis. Together with the Church of Greece we also take seriously the political and societal implications of growing racism and extremism in Greece. These are storm clouds on the horizon that cannot be ignored or wished away.

The WCC and CEC stand with the EU and the people of Greece so together they are able to address this crisis at all levels: financial, humanitarian, moral, political and spiritual.

"Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." (Matt. 5:9)

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Guy Liagre
Conference of European Churches

Federal Republic of Germany

- **Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Joachim Gauck, the newly-elected president of the Federal Republic of Germany, 20 March 2012**

Honourable Mr President,

With millions of German citizens, we delight in your election! It is noteworthy that, in you, the nation has selected a pastor whose courageous action for human freedom contributed to the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany. You saw this political engagement as an expression of your calling to proclaim the Christian gospel. Consequently, you have achieved recognition and won a high degree of trust that will aid in establishing moral force within this highest office of German democracy.

It was ten years ago in October that we were able to welcome Dr Johannes Reu, one of your predecessors as Bundespräsident, when he came to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. Similarly, we extend to you our eager invitation to visit the World Council of Churches. I would be very pleased to welcome you here.

With the greatest respect,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
(letter sent in German)

- **Joint oral intervention by CCIA and the Forum Human Rights Germany on the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council, of Germany, 19 September 2013**

Thank you Mr President!

This is a joint statement on behalf of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs with the World Council of Churches and the German Forum Human Rights, a network of currently 51 non-governmental organizations dealing with human rights in- and outside Germany.

We appreciate the efforts made by the German government in order to improve the participation of civil society in preparing and conducting the UPR process. In particular, we emphasise the opportunity to widely discuss the draft of the state report as well as the draft version of the government's replies to the recommendations made on 25 April 2013. Compared to other experiences in the UPR, this is surely a better practice.

While we acknowledge the efforts in terms of an improved consultation mechanism with civil society, we remain rather critical with the substance. Although the German government has accepted the larger part of the 200 recommendations, critical issues like migration, asylum seekers, discrimination, a structure of racism in state institutions, double or multiple nationality, equality of payment, poverty, transparency and anti-corruption, as well as

strengthening the international human rights standards are not addressed in a satisfactory manner; and the German government can do better.

For instance, we do not share the view of the German government denying the ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. On the one hand, the rights of so called 'irregular migrants' are as such human rights, and if those rights are – according to the government – not compatible with German law, then something is wrong with this law. On the other hand, the Convention on Migrant Workers foresees genuine rights for family members which are not that explicitly enshrined in other covenants, and therefore the German government fails to implement a human rights standard. By the way, the same restrictive understanding by the German government towards family members rules the entire system dealing with migration and asylum.

We neither follow the argument that a concrete date for signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights cannot be given. It is not a matter of predicting a procedural timeframe, it is simply the political unwillingness which hampers the ratification.

These are just two examples for elucidating the fact, that despite the indeed extensive system of legal protection and complaints mechanisms at federal and state level, there is still a lot of room left for improvement and expansion of human rights standards, whose scope is detailed in our stakeholder report as well as in the OHCHR summary. Such an assessment runs obviously contrary to the government's reply to recommendations 124.44 and 124.46. The network of Forum Human Rights will challenge those gaps in the follow-up of the UPR and continuously report back to the Human Rights Council.

Thank you Mr President!

France

- **Statement by WCC general secretary condemning hate crimes in France, 22 March 2012**

It is with dismay and deep sadness that I heard of the attack on the school in Toulouse, and the murder there of three young Jewish children, and the father of two of them. My heart goes out to those who have been bereaved and those who have been injured. My prayers are with them.

The WCC forcefully condemns acts of violence targeted at particular groups on account of their religion or ethnicity. We consider that this is terror against all of us, and should be condemned particularly by all of us who worship the One God, the Creator of all.

We are of course only too aware of the dark history of violence against the Jewish people, especially in Europe, and the shameful story of anti-semitism in Europe and elsewhere.

Yet, as when we experienced a not dissimilar tragedy in Norway last July, I am touched by the way that so many people in France have expressed so strongly their solidarity with those

who have suffered in this week's attacks. They have been determined to make clear how repugnant are the actions of the gunman. As citizens of Europe in the twenty-first century, they clearly cherish the rich diversity in our societies today as one of the fruits of the influence of Christian tradition in our continent and world.

With people of all faiths and traditions, we condemn the murderous acts of recent days. We call for prayer and practical support on behalf of the families of victims at the school in Toulouse, of the French soldiers and police who have been killed or wounded this month, and of all who have been affected by this horrible outbreak of violence. By God's grace, may we rediscover our proper relationship as neighbours called to love one another and live together in justice and peace.

Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

- **Minute adopted by the WCC central committee on the unlawful detention of Archbishop Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church; Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012**

"I was in prison and you came to visit me'. . .'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these Brothers and Sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:36,40)

His Beatitude, Archbishop Dr Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church was arrested whilst crossing the border from Greece into the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) on 12 December 2011. Unfounded charges were brought against Archbishop Jovan, following which he was tried and sentenced *in absentia*, without the basic right to defence, to two and a half years imprisonment by the Court of Appeals in Veles. Initially detained unlawfully at Veles, he was transferred to more solitary confinement in Idrizovo Prison on 16 January 2012. This is his sixth consecutive detention, despite two acquittals by the Municipal Court in Veles.

Amnesty International in 2005, predicated on the staged court cases and state persecution on religious grounds against Archbishop Jovan by the courts of FYROM, initiated ten years ago on the grounds of different religious beliefs, declared Archbishop Jovan a "prisoner of conscience".

The persecution against the archbishop now continues and has been extended to include the intimidation of members of the archbishop's family, the interrogation of hierarchs, clergy, monastics and faithful of the Archdiocese of Ochrid with added threats of confiscation, whilst denying Archbishop Jovan the essential right to visitations and external communications.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has denounced the arrest and unlawful detention of His Beatitude Archbishop Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje at the request of His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The general secretary of WCC has written letters to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**,** tothe United Nations special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and to the president of the

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), expressing concern that Archbishop Jovan's persecution over the past years constitutes a flagrant violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief**,** as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012, therefore:

A. ***Decries*** the unlawful imprisonment of Archbishop Jovan and the continued persecution of the members of the Archdiocese of Ochrid, and the members of the Archbishop's family;

B. ***Calls*** upon the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to immediately release Archbishop Jovan and to cease and desist persecuting the Archdiocese of Ochrid;

C. ***Urges***the authorities inFYROM to recognize the essential right to freedom of religion or belief, as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

D. ***Requests*** the member churches of the WCC to join in prayer and solidarity with Archbishop Jovan by writing letters of protest to the relevant authorities;

E. ***Encourages***the CCIA to organize a solidarity visit and continue to advocate for the release of Archbishop Jovan.

Greece

- **Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the current financial and economic crisis with a focus on Greece, Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012**

"At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality…" (2.Cor. 8. 14, NIV)

We live in an interconnected and interdependent world which is experiencing more than ever before, a severe financial crisis. This crisis is due to various reasons such as unjust economic and financial policies; structural weaknesses of political, economic and financial institutions; and a lack of ethical values in a world that is increasingly dominated by the greed of the powerful seeking short-term advantages and maximum profit and denial of the need of the powerless. The events since 2008 have caused severe strains in the global economy, and have strained public finances even as the millions of people who lost their jobs, pensions and homes in the aftermath continue to clamour for social protection.

Europe has been at the centre of the most recent economic problems, and the immediate challenge for the Euro zone is the financial crisis in Greece. In addition, Italy and Spain, the third- and fourth-largest economies in the euro zone respectively, represent another major problem, with investors pushing the interest rates on their bonds to unsustainable levels. The fear is that financial instability in the Euro zone will provoke another global panic similar to – and potentially graver than – the one in 2008 with adverse consequences for socio-economically weak nations and peoples.

Triggered by the 2008 global financial fallout, Greece's debt problem arose partly from government mismanagement, but blame also attaches to irresponsible lenders that offered easy loans and stimulated housing bubbles, regulators that failed to regulate, and political leaders who were blind to the challenges of establishing a single European currency system among diverse economies. In Greece, the harsh austerity packages aimed at stabilising markets and satisfying international creditors have created a new 'underclass' of the unemployed, homeless and hungry. Since 2010, taxes have been raised especially indirect taxes of up to more than 20 per cent on food; pensions and state salaries slashed across the board, and retrenchment of public workers in tens of thousands. An alarming unemployment rate, more than 20 percent in general and more than 50 percent among the youth, has caused deteriorating living standards leading to frustration, anger and violence, especially against immigrants. Public nursing programmes for the elderly have been shut down. Small businesses are being forced to close or struggle to survive. Women's unpaid labour is substituting for cutbacks in social programmes. Suicides have spiralled in the last couple of years.

The ministries of many church congregations are being directly challenged and affected by these changes. As an example, many churches' feeding and shelter programmes are struggling to keep up with the growing numbers of people availing their services; and the spiritual and pastoral needs of those experiencing these challenges in their families are increasingly profound.

Despite many severe measures, Greece's debt has not been brought under control. Tax evasion is a significant issue in certain sectors of Greek society. Austerity is resulting in a vicious cycle of economic decline, hampering recovery by dampening domestic demand and eroding national tax revenues, and therefore making it even more challenging for the country to settle its debt. There is no justice when those who had little part in generating the crisis pay the highest price for it. It is immoral to demand austerity and debt repayment at human and social cost which falls unfairly on the weaker members of society. Moreover, there is a need for a healthy approach to creativity, personal and corporate financial responsibility for the sake of the common good, productivity and small business in order to create the optimal conditions for the exercise of generosity, compassion and justice.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been closely observing the global financial situation since the unravelling of financial markets in 2008 and has issued letters addressed to the United Nations General Assembly and the Group 20 as well as statements calling on governments to go beyond short-term measures and to address the roots of the financial and economic crisis.

We believe that reforming the international financial and monetary systems in the context of global public authority is an urgent priority. We need to be engaged in a process of searching for a viable model of sustainable development and associated financial systems.

In this painful financial crisis, the church is being called upon to defend the dignity of all people, as made in the image of God. The crisis is spiritual and moral, as well as economic. The Christian values of justice and love have a renewed importance in Europe today. The excessive differences between the wealthy and the poor, and the growing levels of unemployment, especially among young people, which have developed in recent decades are immoral, and will not form the basis for a healthy society. The church is bound to believe that

current events embody a message from God, and will give us an opportunity for discernment to shape our visions for a better future of equality and justice to all God's people.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012, therefore:

A. ***Affirms*** its solidarity with the people of Greece, and others who are particularly suffering from the current crisis;

B. **Reiterates** our call for economic policies which do not encourage irresponsible debt, national or private, and which spread the benefits of wealth more fairly to all citizens, especially the weak and marginalised, including young people;

C. ***Urges*** the prevention of the recurrence of crises in the future, by the regulation and restructuring of the banking industry, and continuation of search for deep-seated transformations in the current international financial regime, as outlined in the WCC central committee statement on "Just Finance and an Economy of Life," issued in September 2009;

D. ***Supports*** the principle of a financial transaction tax (FTT) as a sensible tool that will enable governments to meet their obligation to protect and fulfil the economic, social and cultural rights of their people. The FTT would not only help to curb speculation, but would also ease sovereign debt loads, transfer the burden from ordinary people to the private sector which set off the crisis in the first place, and considerably expand government fiscal space for spending on urgently needed social protection policies;

E. ***Calls*** upon churches in this time of crisis to address these issues with a particular focus of talking to power on the one hand and seeking ways of supporting those who are now marginalized by the current financial policies on the other, and commend them for their ongoing attention to the spiritual and pastoral needs of those, including youth, whose lives will be most directly affected by these troubling economic challenges;

F. **Urges** the churches in Europe to stand together and to advocate for common European solutions to the financial and social crisis that help to deepen the project of European Unity as a project of Just Peace on the continent;

G. ***Invites*** churches and faith-based organizations to continue to mobilize and to support one another for the immediate relief and assistance of the weakest members of our society.

Hungary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the president and the prime minister of the Republic of Hungary expressing concern on the transfer of a convicted military officer, Lt. Ramil Safarov, back to his native country of Azerbaijan, 1 September 2012**

Dear President Áder,
Dear Prime Minister Orbán,

I write to you to on behalf of the World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of 349 churches seeking unity, peace, and justice. We are deeply troubled to learn of the news that on 31 August 2012, the Ministry of Justice of Hungary transferred a convicted military officer, Lt. Ramil Safarov, back to his native country of Azerbaijan. We understand that upon his return, the authorities of Azerbaijan immediately pardoned and released Lt. Safarov, despite his 2006 confession and conviction for the 2004 murder of Lt. Gurden Markarian, in the Budapest City Court. We note with much disappointment that this has only added to the tragedy of the incident in which these two men had come together to participate in the NATO Partnership for Peace program. The transfer and release of Lt. Safarov has caused great stress to the family and friends of Lt. Markarian, and his own native country of Armenia. The unfortunate result of these actions also has been the cessation of diplomatic ties from Armenia to Hungary and an increase in tensions in the region.

The transfer of Safarov appears as an action that was not properly considered on the part of the Hungarian government. Safarov's release by the Azerbaijan government, despite his life sentence, runs counter to normative practices of justice. We condemn actions that severely undermine justice and reconciliation for the peoples of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the region, who have a right to live side by side with dignity, respect for human rights and in freedom.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

cc: WCC Member Churches in Hungary
President Serzh Sargsyan, Republic of Armenia
His Holiness Karekin II, catholicos of All Armenians, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin

Italy

- **Statement by WCC general secretary, welcoming the landmark ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on migrants' right of non-refoulement, 23 February 2012**

The World Council of Churches welcomes the landmark ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on 23 February 2012, in which the EU Court ruled that Italy violated the rights of Eritrean and Somali migrants by sending them back to Libya.

The WCC believes that this court ruling is a turning point regarding national responsibilities towards migrants, in that this decision by the court is in line with the principle of non-refoulement in international law which prohibits states from returning asylum-seekers and uprooted people to a country or territory where they might be subjected to torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, or where their lives and freedom might be at risk.

The vulnerability of asylum-seekers and migrant workers has always been a concern of the WCC. Increasing internal political unrest coupled with the current financial crisis has triggered migration, by legal and illegal means, at an alarming rate.

The World Council of Churches believes that although there is an increase in the number of people who try to reach the territories of developed countries and claim asylum due to hardships they face in their home countries, this should not be a pretext for developed nations to undermine the protection of the rights of refugees.

Irrespective of their status as refugees or illegal migrants, they are human beings first and foremost. They should therefore be treated humanely and be allowed to benefit from all internationally recognized human rights standards.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Statement of concern by WCC general secretaryover the death of migrants off the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, 4 October 2013**

It is with sadness, horror and concern that we have learned of the deaths yesterday of more than 100 people after the capsizing of a migrant boat in the Mediterranean off the coast of Italy. We mourn with their families and communities, and pray that God will comfort and sustain their loved ones. We hold the survivors, and all migrants forced to take these dangerous journeys, in our thoughts and prayers.

While we offer our condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives, we also ask for serious demonstration of a political will by those in power to put an end to the frequent occurrences of people dying at sea. The chaotic political and economic situations in the region have bred not only desperation among people but also provided openings for opportunistic criminals. And legitimate concerns over border controls by Italy and other European Union member states must never compromise the safety of those who, in desperation, take to the seas for refuge elsewhere.

We are aware of the difficulties faced by the people of Lampedusa and the government of Italy as a result of the continuous arrival of migrants and growing responsibility to care and provide for them. We urge that the European Union undertake all necessary measures to support Italy's efforts to help Lampedusa provide safety and security for the vulnerable communities of migrants, especially women and children, who are facing constant threats to their dignity and wellbeing.

Within the larger framework, this tragedy again reminds us of the dramatic divisions between rich and poor in this world, and that people in some African countries endure large-scale economic injustices. These are the roots of much migration, and they are realities we must all address together in the name of the God of life – for their sake, and that of the whole human family.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Norway

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Bishop Gunnar Stålsett of the Church of Norway on the occasion of his receiving the Medal of the Order of Timor-Leste, 16 November 2010**

Dear Gunnar,

We would like to congratulate you for the recent award by the Government of Timor-Leste of the Medal of the Order of Timor-Leste. May it be a sign of the shared hopes of the people of that country.

It is a timely and appropriate sign of recognition and gratitude of your contribution in many places. The award has special meaning here because the honour comes from someone with whom the World Council of Churches has had a long and fruitful collaboration, the president of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace laureate, Jose Ramos Horta.

The citation notes aspects of work and ministry that we recognize as hallmarks of your approach to the difficult work of peace. These we heartily affirm: support for dialogue in key sectors of Timorese society, commitment to a consultative approach, engagement with leaders from all walks of life – from women's groups to church leaders, from youth organizations to martial arts groups – and, finally, the successful passage of legislation to secure the reconciliation process in Timor-Leste.

The citation is a reminder of your work in pursuit of peace over many years in Guatemala, Southern Africa, the Balkans, and with the religious leaders of Europe. While here in Geneva, you helped to bridge the gaps among churches from vastly different parts of the world who hold to the same confession. Recently, you joined our efforts to bring an international ecumenical voice to key governments at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in New York.

Our hope and prayers go to the people of Timor-Leste, that God may grant them the fruits of peace and to strengthen all who labour there for reconciliation and new beginnings.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary and central committee moderator to the Christian Council of Norway, expressing deep shock and sadness caused by the attacks perpetrated in Oslo and on Utoyea, 29 July 2011**

Dear Mr Steen and Dr Nielsen,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, we would like to express our deep shock and sadness caused by the terrible attacks on humans, youth, civil servants, Norwegian leadership

and the people and society as a whole perpetrated in Oslo and on Utoyea.

At the same time, we wish to express our deepest solidarity with the people, churches, and authorities of Norway. These horrible acts of violence have shaken us and our foundations but, at the same time, have caused us to recommit ourselves to join our forces and values to promote a world free of hatred, violence, racism, discrimination and intolerance.

We ensure you of our total support for continuing to deepen and promote the Christian and moral values that are indispensably part of the common values systems of the Norwegian churches and society and of the ecumenical movement.

We have registered with deep respect the call issued in this very sense by the highest authorities of Norway, as well as the moving public recommitment of the Norwegian people towards these values. We will keep praying for your nation and people and above all for the families of those who were victimized.

May God help Norway and all of us to overcome the wounds and consequences of these acts of terror!

Yours in our common Lord, crucified and risen,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit	Rev. Dr Walter Altmann
General secretary	Moderator, central committee

- **Reflections by WCC general secretary on the tragedy in Norway, 16 August 2011**

As the world's attention turns toward the tenth anniversary of 11 September 2001, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit ponders what we may learn from more recent acts of terror in his homeland.

I was on summer holiday during the second half of July, spending time with family, former colleagues and other friends in my native Norway. As it happens, my travels took me into Oslo on 22 July. As I was leaving the city, I heard the terrible news of the many murders in the capital and at the Utøya Island youth camp.

Like many Norwegians, I was acquainted with some of the victims and their distraught families. One of those killed on Utøya was the son of a Norwegian official who had visited me only months before in the Geneva offices of the World Council of Churches. Like many Norwegians, I am still struggling to realize that this actually happened.

The man who has confessed to causing this carnage insists that he acted in defence of "Christian culture". He has adopted an attitude that diverse "civilizations" must inevitably "clash". He is criminally mistaken.

In a united pastoral response to the tragedy of 22 July, the churches of Norway have exhibited how to embody a genuinely Christian culture and act in line with truly Christian values. They work in cooperation and empathy with representatives of other faiths. The people of Norway

are demonstrating that a nonviolent response to violence is the strongest, most courageous response possible.

An image that comes to me again and again is that of the Christian pastor and the Muslim imam standing side by side at the funeral of one of the young victims of violence.

This picture has been broadcast and published internationally. It has become a nearly iconic symbol of the determination to build a sustainable, caring, open society – together. Many people from a variety of nations have told me they were profoundly encouraged by all the people of Norway, of whatever background, for their positive, communal response to terror despite the pain it inflicts.

As churches, we are committed to work together for Just Peace. That means striving for open societies where people of all groups are treated as individual human beings with their duties and rights, and where unjust and sinful behaviour is condemned. We must consult our consciences – about what we say, and what we do not say – and continue in dialogue with our neighbours.

In times like these, we are called to reflect on the impact of the most fundamental Christian value: the command to love our neighbour. We see how much this is necessary in times of pain and death. We see how much we need the mutual embrace of love and respect amongst us all. We see how much the command to love is needed when we address honestly the profound challenges implied by changes in immigration patterns and an increasingly multi-religious society.

For all of us, the human catastrophe of 22 July serves as a dire warning.

Poland

- **Letters from the WCC deputy general secretary expressing condolences upon hearing of the plane crash in Smolensk in which 97 leading figures from Poland lost their lives, 12 April 2010**

To H.E. Mr Zdzisław Rapacki, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiaryand permanent representative of the Mission of the Republic of Poland tothe United Nations Office and other International Organizations inGeneva

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, the broadest and most inclusive representation of the modern ecumenical movement whose goal is Christian unity, I would like to express our profound sorrow upon hearing of the plane crash in Smolensk on Saturday in which ninety-seven people lost their lives. For your country, the loss of the president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, his wife, leading politicians, military leaders, well known personalities in the financial and cultural life of Poland, as well as clergy of different confessions is a very heavy burden.

We assure you that our fellowship of churches from all around the world, including four Polish churches (Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Poland, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, Old-Catholic Mariavite Church in Poland and Polish Catholic Church in Poland), will mourning with you during these sad days, together with the people of Poland, and will pray for the healing of this deep loss for Poland and the entire world.

Yours cordially,
Georges Lemopoulos
Deputy general secretary

To H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy SeeMission to the United Nations in Geneva

Your Eminence,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I would like to express our profound sorrow to hear of the plane crash in Smolensk on Saturday in which ninety-seven people lost their lives. For Poland, the loss of the president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, his wife, leading politicians, military leaders, well known personalities in the financial and cultural life of Poland, as well as clergy of different confessions is a very heavy burden.

We are also aware of the death of the those serving the Roman Catholic Church – His Grace Bishop General of division Tadeusz Ploski, chief of the Roman Catholic chaplains in the Army of Republic of Poland; Fr. Lieutenant Colonel Jan Osinski, ordinariate of Polish Army, Fr. Roman Indrzejczyk, chaplain for the president, Fr. Prelate Bronislaw Gostomski, Fr. Jozef Joniec, Fr. Zdzislaw Krol, Fr. Andrzej Kwasnik. Please accept our condolences at this heavy loss for the Roman Catholic Church, especially for all Roman Catholics in Poland.

We assure you that our fellowship of churches will mourn with you during these sad days, together with the people of Poland, and will pray for the healing of this deep loss for Poland and the entire world.

Sincerely yours,
Mr Georges Lemopoulos
Deputy general secretary

To H.E. Archbishop Józef Michalik, Metropolitan Archbishop, president of thePolish Conference of Bishops

Your Eminence,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I would like to express our profound sorrow to hear of the plane crash in Smolensk on Saturday in which ninety-seven people lost their lives. For your country, the loss of the president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, his wife, leading politicians, military leaders, well known personalities in the financial and cultural life of Poland, as well as clergy of different confessions is a very heavy burden.

We are also aware of the death of the those serving the Roman Catholic Church – His Grace Bishop General of division Tadeusz Ploski, chief of the Roman Catholic chaplains in the Army of Republic of Poland; Fr. Lieutenant Colonel Jan Osinski, ordinariate of Polish Army, Fr. Roman Indrzejczyk, chaplain for the president, Fr. Prelate Bronislaw Gostomski, Fr. Jozef Joniec, Fr. Zdzislaw Krol, Fr. Andrzej Kwasnik. Please accept our condolences at this heavy loss for the Roman Catholic Church, especially for all Roman Catholics in Poland.

We assure you that our fellowship of churches will mourn with you during these sad days, together with the people of Poland, and will pray for the healing of this deep loss for Poland and the entire world.

Sincerely yours,
Mr Georges Lemopoulos
Deputy general secretary

To Rev. Ireneusz Lukas, director of the Polish Ecumenical Council

Dear Rev. Lukas,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I would like to express our profound sorrow to hear of the plane crash in Smolensk on Saturday in which ninety-seven people lost their lives. For Poland, the loss of the president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, his wife, leading politicians, military leaders, well known personalities in the financial and cultural life of Poland, as well as clergy of different confessions is a very heavy burden.

We are also aware of the death of the those serving the Polish Ecumenical Council: Archbishop General of Brigade DrMiron Chodakowski, head of the Orthodox Chaplains in the Army of the Republic of Poland from the Polish Autocephalous Church in Poland and Oberst ADAM PILCH, deputy of the Evangelical Bishop in the Polish Army, from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. Please accept our condolences at this heavy loss for the two member churches of your Ecumenical Council

We assure you that our fellowship of churches will mourn with you during these sad days, together with the people of Poland, and will pray for the healing of this deep loss for Poland and the entire world.

Sincerely yours,
Mr Georges Lemopoulos
Deputy general secretary

To H.B. Archbishop Sawa, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All of Poland of thePolish Autocephalous Orthodox Church

Your Beatitude,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I would like to express our profound sorrow to hear of the plane crash in Smolensk on Saturday in which ninety-seven people lost their lives. For Poland, the loss of the president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, his wife, leading politicians, military leaders, well known personalities in the financial and cultural life of Poland, as well as clergy of different confessions is a very heavy burden.

We are also aware of the death of His Eminence Archbishop General of Brigade Dr Miron Chodakowski, head of the Orthodox Chaplains in the Army of the Republic of Poland. Please accept our condolences at this heavy loss for your Church.

We assure you that our fellowship of churches will mourn with you during these sad days, together with the people of Poland, and will pray for the healing of this deep loss for Poland and the entire world.

Respectfully yours,
Mr Georges Lemopoulos
Deputy general secretary

To Bishop Jerzy Samiec of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confessionin Poland

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I would like to express our profound sorrow to hear of the plane crash in Smolensk on Saturday in which ninety-seven people lost their lives. For Poland, the loss of the president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, his wife, leading politicians, military leaders, well known personalities in the financial and cultural life of Poland, as well as clergy of different confessions is a very heavy burden.

We are also aware of the death of Rev. Oberst Adam Pilch, deputy of the Evangelical Bishop in the Polish Army, from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. Please accept our condolences at this heavy loss for your Church.

We assure you that our fellowship of churches will mourn with you during these sad days, together with the people of Poland, and will pray for the healing of this deep loss for Poland and the entire world.

Sincerely yours,
Mr Georges Lemopoulos
Deputy general secretary

Republic of Albania

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania, on the occasion of his receiving the Skanderberg medal in recognition of his merits in the field of interreligious dialogue, 22 April 2010**

Your Beatitude,

In the jubilant atmosphere of the Easter season, we have received with great joy the news that Your Beatitude had been awarded by H.E. Bamir Topi, the president of Albania, the medal of "Skanderbeg".

We are very proud that Your Beatitude, a world-wide known and recognized religious leader and one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches, received this high distinction together with the three spiritual leaders of the Muslim, Roman Catholic and Bektashi communities in the country for your ceaseless efforts and your precious contribution to strengthening the spiritual roots and the religious harmony and coexistence of the Albanian people.

We were privileged in the World Council of Churches to be enriched, very early in your academic journey, with your reflections and findings on interreligious dialogue. Later on, we have benefitted from your genuine missionary vision and experience highlighting both the challenges and the tremendous spiritual potential of religious pluralism. Now we are happy that all this is embodied, in a tangible way, in your genuine pastoral concern for all people and all religious traditions in Albania.

We are grateful that your ecumenical vision, deeply grounded in the Orthodox theology and spirituality, can inspire, encourage and strengthen all people of good will in Albania and throughout the world for a peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

May God, the God of love and joy, the God of life and resurrection, you have faithfully proclaimed all along your life bless all your endeavours.

Yours in our common Lord Jesus Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, expressing concern at the methodology and results of the Albania Census 2011, 1 May 2013**

Your Excellency,

Kindly accept my cordial greetings!

The World Council of Churches would like to express its concern on the methodology followed and on the reliability of the results of the 2011 census in Albania regarding the optional question of religious affiliation. The latest official report of INSTAT regarding the religious identity of the population from the 2011 Census declares that Orthodox Christians in Albania are 6.75% and that the overall number of Christians has been drastically reduced from 31% to 17%.

The restoration of religious life in all the traditional religious communities and especially the flourishing of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, in the years since the coming of democracy in 1991, after the long antireligious persecution, are quite evident throughout the country. The Orthodox Church possesses evident (baptismal registers, from both before and after the persecution and the registers of 460 Orthodox parishes throughout the country) that the numbers of Orthodox Christians in Albania 24% of the population.

Following the results of the census, the Orthodox Church of Albania distributed a questionnaire regarding the census to Orthodox participants at liturgies held on two Sundays, December 9 and 16, 202 in Tirana, Durrës, Berat, Korçë, Vlorë, and other cities. The results were disturbing: 7,118 persons completed the questionnaire which included their first and last names and their address. Of these only 2,46 persons or 34.68% declared that they were visited and questioned regarding their religious affiliation during the census; 4,643 persons or 65.23% were not vsited or when visited were not asked about their religious affiliation by registrars of the census; 56 persons declared the registrars wrote information in pencil or not in the official form and an additional eleven persons testified that the registrars refused to record religious affiliation or did so only under significant pressure. Moreover they received testimonies that in a a large number of cases citizens were not asked to sign the census form and that information was written in a notebook rather than the official form as procedure required. The results of this questionnaire show that in 65% of the cases there were irregularities in the census taken with regard to religious affiliation.

It is worth mentioning that according to the Council of Europe ("Third Opinion of the Council of Europe on Albania adopted 23.11.2011,") the population census *'cannot be considered to be reliable and accurate, raises issues of compatibility with the principles enshrined in Article 3 of the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities...'.*

The Constitution of Albania guarantees freedom of religion or belief. Article 3 charges the state with ensuring religious coexistence. Article 20 restates protection for minority religious rights and freedoms. Furthermore, Albania is a signatory to international human rights instruments guarantying freedom of religion or belief.

Having full confidence in your work for the respect, protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief around the world, we urge you, prof. Dr Bielefeld, to use your good offices to ensure that freedom of religion or belief for all citizens of Albania s fully respected.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries expressing concern about violent incidents at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, in Premeti, 28 August 2013**

The letter was sent to H.E. Mr Edi Rama, prime minister of the Republic of Albania, the EU special representative for Human Rights, the UN high commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the leadership of the World Council of Churches and of the Conference of European Churches, we are writing to express our profound concern about the violent incidents that took place at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, a holy place of the

Orthodox Christianity for centuries, in the town of Premeti, Albania, on 16 August and in the days that followed.

With great dismay we received the news that on the day following the celebration of the Dormition of Virgin Mary, a group of a private security company staff facilitated by employees of the municipality, attacked and forcibly removed the clergy, removed and threw away the Christian holy scriptures and holy chalice and sealed the church, thus preventing the faithful from accessing their place of religious worship. Even if there was some dispute involved, a church and its holy site cannot be handled this way without a reaction from the authorities.

These events tarnish the international image of Albania and bring to mind sad images of the past. Irrespective of any alleged legal claims on the part of the local authorities, such acts of vandalism and sacrilege are unacceptable and reprehensible in a democratic society which has an obligation to provide guarantees for the respect of the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and rights, such as the right to freedom of religion, which includes the unhindered exercise of religion and the protection of the places of worship.

We strongly concur with his Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania who from the Cathedral of the resurrection in Tirana said that ‘we can not allow the sacrilege of holy sites and temples in the 21st century, not in a Europe of fundamental rights and freedoms " and called upon the Albanian Government, to abide by the agreement it signed with the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania for the return of the traditional holy places and archives, which as of January 2009 is a law of the state.

In October 2012, the European Commission recommended that Albania be granted EU candidate status, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform. The European Union is ‘founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law’. Such acts of vandalism not only constitute a serious violation of one of the core values of the European Union and of the priorities of the United Nations, but also a grave offence to the religious sentiments of all Christians in Albania and worldwide.

The Constitution of Albania guarantees freedom of religion or belief and protection for the rights and freedoms of religious minorities. Furthermore, Albania is a signatory party to all the major UN human rights conventions. Therefore, your Excellency, we call upon your good offices to ensure that Albania abides by its international obligations for the respect of the rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms and more particularly the right to religious freedom, for all its citizens and that it guarantees the free practice of religion and access of all faithful to their place of worship, in this case of the Orthodox Christians to the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary and that it takes all necessary steps to punish those responsible for these condemnable acts of vandalism and sacrilege.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Guy Liagre
General secretary
Conference of European Churches

- **Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries to H.E. Mr Edi Rama, prime minister of the Republic of Albania, expressing concern about violent incidents at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, in Premeti, 16 September 2013**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the leadership of the World Council of Churches and of the Conference of European Churches, please accept our congratulations for your newly elected government and our best wishes for your work in the coming years.

We are writing to express our profound concern about the violent incident that took place a the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, a holy place of the Orthodox Christianity for centuries, in the town of Premeti, Albania, on 16 August and in the days that followed.

With great dismay we received the news that on the day following the celebration of the Dormition of Virgin Mary, a group of private police officers facilitated by employees of the municipality, attached and forcibly removed the clergy, removed and threw away the Christian holy scriptures and holy chalice and sealed the Church, thus preventing the faithful from accessing their place of religious worship.

These events tarnish the international image of Albania and bring to mind sad images of the past. Irrespective of any alleged legal claims on the part of the local authorities, such acts of vandalism and sacrilege are unacceptable and reprehensible in a democratic society which has an obligation to provide guarantees for the respect of the rule of law, fundamental freedom and rights, such as the right to freedom of religion, which includes the unhindered exercise of religion and the protection of the places of worship.

We strongly concur with his Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania who from the Cathedral fo the Resurrection in Tirana said that *'we cannot allow the sacrilege of holy sites and temples in the 21st century, not in a Europe of fundamental rights and freedoms'* and called upon your government to abide by the agreement it signed with the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania for the return of the traditional holy places and archives, which as of January 2009 is a law of the Albanian State.

In October 2012, the European Commission recommended that Albania be granted EU candidate status, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform. The European Union is 'founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law'. Such acts of vandalism not only constitute a serious violation of one of the core values of the European Union and of the priorities of the United Nations, but also a grave offence to other religious sentiments of all Christians in Albania and worldwide.

We are aware that the Constitution of Albania guarantees freedom of religion or belief and protection for the rights and freedom of religious minorities. Furthermore, Albania is a signatory party to all the major UN human rights conventions. We hope that your new government will heal the wounds, injustices and discrimination against religious minorities of the past. There, your Excellency, we call upon your government, to guarantee the free access of all faithful to their places of worship, in this case the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, to resolve the issue in accordance to the international obligations of your country, guarantying and safeguarding freedom of religion for all the citizens of Albania and to take all

necessary steps to punish those responsible for these condemnable acts of vandalism and sacrilege.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Guy Liagre
General secretary
Conference of European Churches

Russian Federation

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to His Holiness Kyrill I, patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, expressing shock at the terrorist attacks in the Moscow metro, 30 March 2010**

Your Holiness,

We have received with shock the terrible news of the terrorist attacks in the Moscow metro. On behalf of the World Council of Churches allow me to express my compassion with all victims and their families. This is an attack bringing fear and hatred into the life in common of the entire Russian Federation. I am confident that in the fellowship of World Council of Churches we are praying for the victims and mourning together with their relatives, and for a peaceful future of your country.

Terrorist attacks which break lives of innocent people are a sin against God who offers life as a divine gift. These terrorist attacks are even more painful to us because they were committed during the Holy Week when we, all Christians, are reflecting on our Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings for us and our salvation and prepare ourselves to celebrate His Resurrection.

May God heal the deep wounds caused by these terrorist attacks! May the Lord of life protect us all from the aggressions of hate and intolerance!

Sincerely yours in Christ, our common Lord,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Joint letter by the WCC and CEC to His Holiness Kyrill I, patriarch of Moscow and All Russia following the bombing at Domodedovo Airport, 25 January 2011**

Your Holiness,

We write to express our shock and sadness at the news of the bombing at Domodedovo airport yesterday evening. We condemn this act of indiscriminate and lethal violence that has been committed at Moscow's busiest airport and against people in Russia. Tragedy has struck

in everyday life. It affects your society and is close to the life of your church, yet is also felt far away.

People waiting to greet arriving family and friends on flights coming and going from other cities and capitals in some of our countries are suddenly the target of a deadly attack. At least 35 are killed, more than 160 injured and many more traumatized. Among the many casualties from Russia are also some from other countries.

On behalf of our member churches here in Europe and in other regions of the world, we send condolences to your church and to those who are suffering such great loss. We pray for God's mercy and consolation. We are mindful of the people working in emergency medical care, at the airport, the police and security workers.

May all those affected, in churches and communities, know of concern and support from churches and communities abroad. We also pray for God to guide the authorities who are charged with public safety and with the important work of law and justice in service of the public good.

Please convey our condolences to the families of the victims and the news that many are praying for those affected by this tragic event.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita
Interim general secretary
Conference of European Churches

cc. H.E. Metropolitan Dr Hilarion of Volokolamsk

Spain

- **Joint letter from WCC and CEC to H.E. D. José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, president of Spain, regarding inability of retired pastors of minority churches to receive a state pension, 21 January 2010**

The letter addresses the injustice whereby retired pastors and families of the Spanish Evangelical Church and the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church are unable to receive a state pension since, in the time of Franco's dictatorship, minority churches were not officially recognized and thus their clergy were not allowed to contribute to the Spanish social security system.

Excmo. Señor Presidente:

El Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI) es la mayor y más representativa de las organizaciones ecuménicas, cuyo objetivo es la unidad de los cristianos. El CMI esta así mismo profundamente comprometido con los desafíos en materia social, económica y de Derechos Humanos, dado su impacto en las vidas de las personas que pertenecen a nuestras iglesias

miembros. El CMI agrupa a 349 iglesias, denominaciones y comunidades de iglesias en más de 110 países y territorios de todo el mundo que representan más de 560 millones de cristianos, incluidas la mayoría de las iglesias ortodoxas, gran cantidad de iglesias anglicanas, bautistas, luteranas, metodistas y reformadas, así como muchas iglesias unidas e independientes.

La Conferencia de Iglesias Europeas (CEC) reúne alrededor de 120 iglesias ortodoxas, protestantes, anglicanas y de viejos católicos de numerosos países europeos, así como más de 40 organizaciones asociadas. La CEC fue fundada en 1959 y cuenta con oficinas en Ginebra, Bruselas y Estrasburgo. Sus actividades se orientan a la representación de sus iglesias miembros ante las diferentes instituciones europeas.

Nos dirigimos a su Excelencia en nuestra calidad de Secretario General del CMI y de Secretario General en funciones de CEC, ambas organizaciones con sede en Ginebra, atendiendo a la petición de nuestras iglesias miembros en su país, entre las que se encuentran la Iglesia Evangélica Española y la Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopal. Ambas Iglesias se ven confrontadas con el hecho de que sus ministros (pastores) en edad de jubilación no reciben pensión alguna del Estado, dado que durante el régimen franquista no se les reconoció oficialmente como Iglesias y no se les permitió a sus ministros realizar los aportes correspondientes a la seguridad social. La injusticia aquí planteada pudiera haber sido resuelta en el marco de la Ley de Memoria Histórica por la que: “Es la hora – dice el texto de la Ley en la exposición de motivos – de que la democracia española y las generaciones vivas que hoy disfrutan de ella, honren y recuperen para siempre a todos los que directamente padecieron las injusticias y agravios producidos, por unos u otros motivos políticos o ideológicos o de creencias religiosas, en aquellos dolorosos períodos de nuestra historia”.

Sabemos que ambas Iglesias se dirigieron en varias ocasiones a distintos equipos de gobierno españoles para hallar una solución apropiada a su situación, sin llegar lamentablemente a resultado concreto alguno. Es por eso que expresamos en nombre del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias y de la Conferencia de Iglesias Europeas nuestra solidaridad con nuestros hermanos y hermanas españolas, en quienes aún se perpetúan las consecuencias de la dictadura franquista y rogamos respetuosamente a Usted y a su gobierno la búsqueda de una solución apropiada a este penoso asunto.

Nuestras Iglesias miembros y sus líderes aprecian profundamente los esfuerzos de su Gobierno para curar las heridas abiertas del pasado. Es por esto que confiamos en que Usted sabrá tratar este problema como un asunto de justicia y aprovechamos esta oportunidad para expresar a Usted y a su Gobierno nuestro profundo respeto y gratitud.

Le saludan muy atentamente,

Reverendo Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
Secretario general
Consejo Mundial de Iglesias

Reverendo Dr Viorel Ioniţă
Secretario general en funciones
Conferencia de Iglesias Europeas

- **Condolence message by WCC general secretary to the Roman Catholic archdiocese, expressing solidarity and offering prayers for the victims of train derailment in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 26 July 2013**

Your Eminence,

We are deeply sorrowful at the news of the deaths and injury resulting from the train derailment that took place on Wednesday near Santiago de Compostela.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches and on my own behalf, please allow me to express our solidarity with the families of the victims, with those injured and with the whole Spanish people in your suffering.

Please be assured that we are united in prayer for those who lost their lives in this catastrophe, and we mourn together with their families, friends and with all pilgrims who had been making their way to Santiago.

The weekly common prayer that takes place in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva next Monday will address this tragic event and similar disasters that have occurred throughout the world in recent weeks. We shall offer prayers in memory of those who passed away and prayers of intercession for the healing of the injured and for the consolation of all who are affected by this tragedy.

While praying and mourning in the aftermath of this catastrophe, we call upon all those responsible for the security of public transport in Europe and beyond to strengthen their efforts in order to avoid such disastrous events in the future.

Unfortunately, during the past month similar travel accidents have caused the deaths and injury of many victims in different parts of the world. God has given us the gift of life as a precious gift, and no resource should be considered too expensive in protecting and preserving it.

Yours in our common Lord,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Turkey

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary welcoming a Turkish government decree allowing for a better protection of the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities, 27 May 2010**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit has welcomed a recent Turkish government decree allowing for a better protection of the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities in Turkey.

"It is only fair that this new and positive development is commended by all those concerned about the situation of Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities in Turkey", said Tveit commenting on the news.

According to a 21 May report by *Ecumenical News International*, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a decree in mid-May ordering local officials "to do more to protect the rights of Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities, such as by returning their confiscated properties and taking action against anti-Christian groups".

"We hope local Turkish officials will expedite the application of this decree and thus bring about an improvement in the situation of communities which, as the prime minister has said, are an inseparable part of the Republic of Turkey and must feel fully valued as citizens of the country", Tveit said.

"Of course, more needs to be done, but this is a sign that goes in the right direction", he added.

"We don't feel that we enjoy our full rights as Turkish citizens", the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said as recently as 17 December 2009, when he was featured by the U.S. TV show 60 minutes.

During the last week of November 2009 representatives of the WCC and the Conference of European Churches made an official visit to Turkey so as to encourage the authorities to improve the situation of religious minorities.

In Istanbul and Ankara, the delegation met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop Aram Atesian from the Armenian Patriarchate, and the Archbishop Mor Timotheos Samuel Aktas of the Syrian Orthodox Mor Gabriel Monastery. It also met representatives of the Jewish community as well as with government officials. The exercise of religious freedom, the legal status of churches, including property issues, and the right to religious education were on the agenda.

Amongst the pending issues for the Ecumenical Patriarchate are the obstacles to the re-opening of the Theological School of Halki, which was the patriarchate's main theological seminary until its closure. Situated on Heybeliada island in the Marmara sea off Istanbul, the school was closed by the Turkish authorities in 1971.

"I visited the Halki school during my visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch last March and was impressed by the fact that it has been maintained in complete repair and ready for the day when it will be allowed to reopen", commented Tveit. "And indeed we pray for this to happen soon."

- **Visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Istanbul, Turkey, 3 March 2012**

The Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on 3 March in Istanbul, Turkey. He met with the Ecumenical Patriarch

Bartholomew I in order to discuss the need for “harmony” and “mutual trust among the religious and national groups”, a gesture greatly appreciated by the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The patriarch expressed his satisfaction over this visit, hoping that the pending issues concerning the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other Christian religious minorities in Turkey will soon be resolved.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate enjoys a “primacy of honour” among the Orthodox churches, related to the ancient status of Constantinople as capital of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Following his visit to the patriarch, Davutoglu said, “What the world, and especially this region, need more than everything is harmony, the will for cohabitation and mutual trust among religious and national groups.”

In appreciation of the foreign minister’s visit, Bartholomew I said, “This visit, like last year’s visit by the vice-president of the government and other officials of the Turkish Republic, testifies to the fact that the attitudes of the state, of today’s government, towards the historical institution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, has changed for the better.”

In May 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a decree ordering local officials “to do more to protect the rights of Christian and non-Muslim religious minorities, such as by returning their confiscated properties and taking action against anti-Christian groups”.

Bartholomew I said that the “old prejudices are gone” and political willingness to address the issues is prevailing. In this framework, he said, “we are optimistic and we expect that our pending problems will also be solved.”

The WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit appreciated the Turkish government’s efforts in reaching out to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

“We are encouraged to hear about the visit of the Turkish foreign minister to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other religious communities’ leaders. We, on behalf of our churches, have strongly advocated for the protection of the rights of Christians and religious minorities in Turkey and elsewhere,” said Tveit.

In March 2010, the WCC general secretary visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

“After my visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch, I had strongly advocated for the reopening of the Theological School of Halki,” he added.

“We hope that these discussions are a significant step forward to resolve the issues and contribute to religious harmony, acceptance and mutual trust in the country. This could be a contribution to similar developments in other states as well,” said Tveit.

United Kingdom

- **Letter of condolence from the WCC general secretary to the Corrymeela Community on the death of Dr David Stevens, 26 May 2010**

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9)

It is with great sadness that we in the World Council of Churches secretariat have received the news of the death of Dr David Stevens, the leader of the Corrymeela Community.

With others in the international ecumenical community who have had the privilege of walking with David, we would like to honour and celebrate the faith, integrity and passion that David shared with many and to a wider world. His constructive analyses, theological insights on forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, and great compassion enabled him to guide churches and lead communities to approach conflict resolution with honesty, courage and love. His work mirrored his profound involvement in the plight and the potential of the people of Northern Ireland.

Communities far beyond Northern Ireland have benefited from the effective and inspirational leadership David gave to the Corrymeela Community. He was instrumental in helping Corrymeela become a safe environment for groups to meet and begin to develop trust and partnerships between communities. His writings and talks on what Christians can bring to the search for reconciliation are recognized internationally. His wise, warm and forthright approach challenged and spurred change even in the most difficult situation. His humbling call to churches dealing with conflict resolution is a stark reminder for all churches on the contrite approach we have to take. “We in the churches have a responsibility for the present state of relationships in this community,” he told a conference in 2004, noting that “there is a necessary ‘Kyrie Eleison’ – Lord have mercy – for us in dealing with this issue”.

His life of ministry is an inspiration. A dedicated ecumenist, David was general secretary of the Irish Council of Churches 1992 to 2003. A Presbyterian elder, he exemplified how a member of a particular community can work to build bridges between different communities and across deep divisions in society. He reflected this in a lifetime of service – from his role as a young volunteer to leadership roles in many facets of society including the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

Our prayers and thoughts are with his family. We stand with all who hold David Stevens in high regard. His memory will continue to inspire us.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Vatican

- **Statement from WCC general secretary on election of the new pope, 14 March 2013**

We in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches ask for God's blessing for Francis I on his election as the new pope. We pray for his health and strength as he takes on this ministry of justice and peace.

This is a turning point in the life of the Roman Catholic Church, but it also has an impact on people of other churches and faiths.

Together with this humble pilgrim of the church, who has lived a simple lifestyle and reflects a passion for social justice and lifting up the poor, we reaffirm our commitment to seeking justice and peace.

We look forward to our continued engagement with the Catholic Church and their presence at our upcoming Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea in October and November where justice and peace is the focus.

Ever since the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches have enjoyed constructive dialogue and cooperation on matters of faith, witness and the fundamental unity of the whole body of Christ.

We have learned that we are pilgrims together in the one ecumenical movement, and we are particularly grateful for the way the Catholic Church works with us on the highly significant issues of unity, ecclesiology, mission and interreligious dialogue.

Now, in close collaboration with Pope Francis, we look forward to building on this positive relationship with the Catholic Church that has been nurtured so carefully in the past. An important aspect of the ecumenical movement is a concept of mutual accountability.

We in the World Council of Churches offer our cooperation to Pope Francis and the whole of the Catholic Church in this spirit. We will continue to cooperate in a loving and affirming relationship. In this way, we will grow together in grace and in hope toward that true unity of believers for which Christ prayed.

We are delighted to greet a pope from Argentina, the first pope from the Global South. Today the vast majority of Christians live in the Global South. The growth of Christianity in the South is likely to continue. This shift has already had an important impact on world Christianity. It is in this context that we will move forward, working together, building our relationship and addressing the important needs of all people today.

Let us use this opportunity to pray for and with Pope Francis to reconfirm that we need one another, to address the challenges of the world in our time.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary

Latin America and Caribbean

- **Statement on peace and human security in Latin America, adopted by the WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 5-8 March 2013**

1. Conventional security threats have receded in Latin America since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the region was roiled by political bloodshed, originated by the implementation of the ideology of national security, military dictatorships and authoritative regimes and left-wing insurgencies. Today unconventional threats have come to the forefront of several countries in the region. Despite various positive developments that have taken place in the area of peace-building and security, organized crime and violence are corroding governance and imperiling democratic legitimacy and the rule of law. A United Nation's study on homicide in 2011 found that killings in Central America were nearing a "crisis point". According to its estimates, the number of people killed by gun crime in Central and South America is four times the world average.

2. The dignity of millions of people in Latin America is affected by the current realities in the region. Human insecurity, drug trafficking and human trafficking, "femicide", organized crime, youth gangs, a supply of illegal guns and corrupt, ineffective state institutions, inequality, poverty, unemployment, discrimination and exclusion of Indigenous Peoples and impunity, are among the prevailing trends.

3. The rise in urban crime-related violence, together with the lifting of a ban on U.S. sales of advanced weapons, has also had a strong impact upon the security of the region. At the same time, the inclusion of Colombia in the framework of the "War on Terror" further increased arms-related trade and aid, causing regional instability. The policies of militarization as a response to the actions of organized crime and drug trafficking have not only failed but they have increased the violence indices and definitively benefit the large capitals. Many Latin American countries have been affected with the wide spread of small arms and light weapons.

4. According to the World Health Organization, gun-related fatalities are the leading cause of death among Latin Americans between ages 15 and 44. The WHO estimates that overall, gunshot wounds kill between 73,000 and 90,000 people annually in Latin America, demonstrating that the region is inundated with firearms. The North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) reveals in its study that there are at least 45 million to 80 million small arms and light weapons in Latin America. About 2,000 guns cross the border between the United States into Mexico almost every day.

5. It is in this context that community, public health and judicial programmes are needed to save as many as possible of the Latin Americans who die in armed violence every day. It is also a reminder of the urgent need for reforms in the arms trade in order to end irresponsible sales and transfers of arms to and within the region and for the support of Latin American states for the Arms Trade Treaty.

6. It is an encouraging sign that Latin America has remained a nuclear weapons-free region since the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Treaty of Tlatelolco) was agreed in 1967.

7. It is necessary to approach and address these problems through structural reforms in the economic and social spheres, as well as through international agreements. The states have the obligation to guarantee the implementation and full enjoyment of human rights by all citizens. There is a need for public policies that safeguard life and guarantee human security, respect for human rights and development. The strengthening of national institutions as well as of the Inter-American human rights system and the international human rights protection mechanisms is necessary.

8. The WCC, the churches in the region and the wider ecumenical movement have a long tradition of involvement in addressing human rights and peace in Latin American countries, especially in the past decades. However, the current situation of increasing levels of violence and human insecurity calls for renewed efforts on behalf of the ecumenical movement in order to address adequately Latin America's mounting problems related to peace, security and human rights. Participants of the commission of the churches in international affairs (CCIA) consultation on *"Peace and Human Security in Latin America"* held in Antigua, Guatemala, in December 2012, expressed concerns about the deteriorating situation in the continent and invited the WCC to play a more active role and call on its member churches and the global ecumenical family to express solidarity at various levels.

Therefore, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, 5-8 March 2013:

A. ***expresses*** its serious concern about the rising levels of violence and human insecurity in many countries in Latin America;

B. ***denounces*** the increasing numbers of extra-judicial killings, discrimination and exclusion of women, youth and migrants in the region;

C. ***condemns*** the persistent discrimination and systematic attacks against Indigenous Peoples and black communities; and ***demands*** that the economic ventures of transnational corporations and local projects in ancestral Indigenous lands be done in consultation with the people of those lands, as stipulated by Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

D. ***expresses*** a special concern about the threats to the territorial and economic sovereignty that different countries of the region have experienced;

E. ***requests*** that the states of Latin America assure the integral protection of human rights defenders in the region. The tasks of human rights defenders in monitoring, denouncing and proposing public policies must be free from pressures and threats. The criminalization of social protest is unacceptable;

F. ***condemns*** the negative policies of the government of the United States towards Cuba, especially the economic sanctions imposed against the country, which constitute a threat to peace and a manifestation of a policy of interference in peoples' right to self-determination;

G. ***welcomes*** the beginning of the peace talks between the government of Colombia and the FARC as a way to fulfill the aspirations of the people of Colombia for a lasting peace with social justice; and ***urges*** a bilateral cease fire during the peace talks;

H. ***urges*** all countries to support the negotiations on a robust Arms Trade Treaty at the United Nations Conference in March 2013 that will conclude the work begun in July 2012;

I. ***acknowledges*** the historical contributions of the WCC in supporting the struggles of the people in Latin America for human rights and democratization; and ***urges*** the WCC to address emerging concerns related to peace and human security in the region;

J. ***calls*** on the churches and the wider ecumenical movement to pray and support decisively the people and churches of Latin America in their struggles for the construction of a society of peace with justice.

Argentina

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Bishop Frank de Nully Brown of the Evangelical Methodist Church in Argentina, regarding the conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the Malvinas Islands (Falkland Islands), 13 April 2012**

Dear Bishop de Nully Brown,

"*May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord"* (2 Peter 1:2).

We are very grateful to you for sharing your concern with the World Council of Churches regarding the situation with the Malvinas Islands (Falkland Islands) which is an area of conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom. We are aware that the rhetoric of confrontation has become even stronger as you will commemorate on April 2012 the thirtieth anniversary of the war over the disputed islands.

We also appreciate the correspondence you shared with the Methodist Church in the UK as well as their response. We fully support the approach expressed by both churches that the attitude of confrontation should be replaced by a spirit and language of peace and reconciliation between both countries and their respective governments. This approach is in the spirit of trajectory of the ecumenical movement and was reaffirmed in our recently held International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), which took place in Kingston, Jamaica on May 2011.

As you have both expressed, we reaffirm the position of appealing to the UN to facilitate the resolution of this conflict which could lead to unpredictable consequences. We are against any military "solution" to the confrontation and urge all parts to respect the life and dignity of the Islanders.

We hope and pray that "the LORD give strength to his people! And bless his people with peace!" (Psalm 29:11).

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

cc Rev. Leo Osborn, president of the Methodist Conference

- **Letter from CCIA director to the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Argentina to the United Nations in Geneva condemning the burning of the temple of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina in Rosario, 3 October 2013**

Your Excellency,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the burning of the temple of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina-Rosario Norte, in the city of Rosario, on 27th September 2013. This is all the more so, as the building where the temple is located also served as the regional headquarters of the Rosario Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (MEDH).We strongly deplore the arson which caused serious damages to the temple and destroyed the academic library and part of the documentations related to the work of the MEDH.

Such acts of vandalism in a place of worship offend not only the religious sentiments of believers but also of all those who are fighting for the protection and promotion of human rights, as this attack not only damaged a place of worship but also an institution which enjoyed local, national and international recognition in the struggle for the defence of human rights and has played an important role in the restoration of democracy in the Republic of Argentina.

As a worldwide fellowship of churches with a long history of engagement in the defence of human rights at regional and international level, we strongly condemn such acts and we hope, your Excellency, that the authorities of your government in Argentina will take necessary actions to undertake a thorough investigation and do what is necessary to bring those responsible to justice.

Respectfully yours,
Mathews George,
Director, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs(CCIA)

- **Solidarity letter Pastor Frank de Nully Brown, Bishop of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina condemning the second vandalism attack on the Evangelical Church of Argentina in Buenos Aires, 16 November 2013**

Estimado hermano Obispo Frank,

“Gracia y paz os sean multiplicadas, en el conocimiento de Dios y de nuestro Señor Jesús” (2 Pedro 1:2).

Recibimos con gran pesar la noticia del segundo ataque vandálico aun o de los templos de la hermana Iglesia Metodista Argentina, en este caso a la Primera Iglesia, en la ciudad capital de Buenos Aires, el pasado día 9 de noviembre. Este templo, además de su valor histórico, como punto de predicación del evangelio desde el año 1843, también ha sido por muchos

años un espacio ecuménico, de encuentro entre hermanos y hermanas de diversas confesiones.

Como Consejo Mundial de Iglesias condenamos enérgicamente este salvaje hecho que produjo destrozos en el edificio, la profanación de su altar y serios daños a su tradicional órgano de significativo valor histórico. Instamos a las autoridades del país a clarificarlos hechos y a evitar que incidentes de este tipo continúen produciéndose en la República Argentina.

Oramos para que Dios continúe bendiciendo y usando a la Iglesia Evangélica Metodista Argentina en la proclamación del evangelio de paz, justicia, amor y reconciliación, en la Patria Argentina. Dios juzgará a su pueblo con justicia y a sus afligidos conjuicio (Salmo 72:2).

Su hermano en Cristo,
Carlos E. Ham (Rev. Dr)
Ejecutivo para los programas de Diaconía y América Latina/Caribe

Brazil

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in Brazil in the wake of the landslides with assurance of the prayers of the worldwide church community, 27 January 2011**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephes. 1:2).

The worldwide church community has been following with great concern the critical situation in southeastern Brazil where heavy rainfall has led to massive landslides leaving more than 800 people dead, another 400 people missing, thousands made homeless as well as causing extensive damage to several towns..

We are praying for the victims of this natural disaster. We offer encouragement to the local and national authorities who are working along with Brazilian churches and international organizations such as the Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance in their efforts to alleviate the suffering of the people, bring support to the most vulnerable and rebuild this part of the country.

As we continue to accompany you in this critical moment, we remind you of the Apostle Paul’s words to the Romans: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints” (Rom. 12:12-13).

May our Lord and Saviour bless you in your work and bring peace to those who are suffering.

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary of the WCC

- **Delivery of documents related to human rights issues during the military dictatorship from 1964-1985 to Brazil's public prosecutors by the WCC general secretary and the WCC central committee moderator, 14 June 2011**

During a two-decade period of brutal dictatorship, in 1979, Brazilian church workers and dissenting lawyers found a loophole in the legal system allowing them to gather evidence of atrocities and other abuses committed by the military regime.

For the next six years, vital information recording the government's crimes against the Brazilian people was surreptitiously photocopied and sent from Brasilia to São Paulo and beyond. The World Council of Churches (WCC), in cooperation with church leaders of many traditions, was a key supporter of gathering this documentation. Much of the material remains in the WCC archives in Geneva, Switzerland.

On 14 June 2011, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, Brazilian Lutheran leader Rev. Dr Walter Altmann, who is moderator of the WCC central committee, and other Christian leaders will deliver to Brazil's public prosecutors three archival cases containing copies of the WCC's deposit of evidence recording this painful aspect of Brazilian history under the military rule of 1964-1985.

The formal ceremony of transfer will take place at the Public Prosecution Office in São Paulo, beginning at 2:30 pm local time. Among the speakers (see full schedule, below) are officials of church and government, including two representatives of ecumenical organizations who were among those tortured by the military.

The archival documents from Geneva will be examined by the public prosecutor's staff and then entrusted to the Brazilian attorney general.

These pages from the WCC archives will assist federal prosecutors in replacing essential data tht has gone missing from the files of the Superior Military Court.

Among the records that have vanished are accounts by political prisoners in which they denounced torture and named their torturers. As files are restored, the contents will be digitized and made widely available under the title "Brasil Nunca Mais [Brazil: Never Again] Digital".

In July 1985, four months after the resumption of civilian rule, an account of 707 legal cases from the military era was published in Portuguese under the title "Brasil: Nunca Mais" and immediately became a best-seller.

The book was a distillation of much lengthier court proceedings covering 6,891 pages. "Brasil: Nunca Mais", a mere 312 pages, was reprinted 20 times in just over two years and is now in its 37th edition. The authors of the book's prefaces were Roman Catholic Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns of São Paulo and the Rev. Dr Philip Potter, then the WCC general secretary.

The Rev. Charles R. Harper, who served from 1973 to 1992 as coordinator of the WCC programme on human rights in Latin America, has described the role of churches in their accompaniment of movements that confronted dictatorships during the so-called "dirty wars"

of the time. In Harper's book, "O Acompanhamento: Ecumenical Action for Human Rights in Latin America 1970-1990" (WCC Publications, 2006), he tells the stories of Christian resistance in Brazil and six neighbouring countries.

Harper recalls, "The WCC had already developed links within the ecumenical community in Brazil. It was involved in collecting reports of illegal detention and torture from the early 1970s. Through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, it had circulated this information on abuses and torture to appropriate United Nations bodies and concerned governments world-wide."

Of the collection of court records Harper says, "By 1980 the project was in high gear. It was carried out in utmost secrecy. Lawyers working with the team applied for the files under the pretext of preparing amnesty submissions. The documents were photocopied and returned without the suspicion of the authorities and transported urgently to a central, hidden collating warehouse in São Paulo."

A national tribute is being planned in honour or in memory of those who preserved and later publicized the court proceedings, including Arns, Presbyterian pastor Jaime Wright, Ricardo Kotscho, Carlos Alberto Libanio Christo (Frei Beto), Luiz Eduardo Greenhalgh, Luis Carlos Sigmaringa Seixas, Paul Vannuchi and Eny Raimundo Moreira.

- **Oral intervention delivered on behalf of the CCIA/WCC at the UN Human Rights Council's 18th session on general debate with special rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples and interactive dialogue with experts mechanism on Indigenous Peoples rights, 21 September 2011**

Oral intervention delivered by Almir Surui Narayamoga, leader of Paiter Suirui People in the State of Rondônia, Brazil on Item 5: General Debate

The Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon are threatened with destruction.

Thank you Mr President,

The Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon suffer constant threats to their lives and their traditional territories.

Illegal deforestation, caused by loggers, ranchers, miners and squatters on Indigenous lands, destroy the trees of the forest; kill the birds, because they destroy their nests; kill the animals that live off the fruits of the forest; and threaten the indigenous people who live and depend on forest.

My people, the Paiter-Surui, are a living proof of what I say here today. We suffer from illegal loggers that steal our forests and threaten to kill our leaders.

The actions of these invaders of indigenous lands expel our people from their territories and put our lives in danger.

Any Indigenous leader that confronts this model which only benefits those who destroy nature is threatened with death, is attacked and maligned suffering all kinds of threats.

Indigenous lands and peoples in Brazil are threatened by the large development pproject proposed under the PAC – the `Accelerated Growth Programme' proposed by the Brazilian Government.

Large dams such as San Antonio and Jirau on the Madeira River in Rondônia State and Belo Monte on the Xingu River in Para State, threaten the lives of Indigenous Peoples including those who are living in voluntary isolation.

The planned paving of the BR 319 Amazon highway has already brought large numbers of settlers who are destroying the forests and impacting indigenous lands. Conflicts between Indians and invaders of their traditional lands have led to indigenous and non-indigenous deaths.

Urgent measures must be taken to ensure our life and peace in Brazil.

We cannot remain silent before such destruction. We need the UN to observe what is happening and to help protect the lives of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil.

I come here to ask you to help in the protection of the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon and particularly those living in voluntary isolation.

Thank you Mr President.

- **Meeting of WCC central committee moderator with the Brazilian minister for human rights, Maria do Rosário, expressing support of the WCC for the implementation of a truth commission in Brazil, 3 November 2011**

On 3 November, the Rev. Dr Walter Altmann, moderator of the central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), met with the Brazilian minister for Human Rights, Maria do Rosário, at her office in Brasília. The main item on the agenda was the support of the WCC for the implementation of a truth commission in the country.

The WCC has extensive experience of such commissions, and during a public act held in São Paulo on 14 June, the WCC handed over to Brazil's attorney general Roberto Gurgel documents related to the project "Brasil: Nunca Mais!" (BNM), which were kept safe at the WCC library archives in Geneva since the 1970s. The BNM project is a wide-ranging record of abuses perpetrated by the military dictatorship in Brazil from the 1960s to the 1980s.

At the hearing, Maria do Rosário was accompanied by her advisor, Dr Nadine Borges, who is in charge of legal affairs, and Rev. Marga Ströher, a Lutheran pastor who currently works at the Special Secretariat for Human Rights, which has ministerial status. Ströher is responsible for the Religious Diversity desk at do Rosário's government ministry.

The minister showed appreciation for the WCC's work, especially in the area of human rights. Altmann presented a few examples from around the world of places where the WCC has played a decisive role in conflict mediation and truth commissions.

Altmann, who was president of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil from 2002 to 2010, presented the minister a copy of *O Acompanhamento*, a book by former WCC staff Rev. Charles R. Harper. The publication is a compilation of initiatives supported by the WCC to defend human rights in Latin America from 1970s to 1990s.

The creation of the truth commission was approved by the Brazilian senate, and the measure will soon be signed into law by President Dilma Rousseff, who will appoint seven official members of the commission as well as 21 advisors.

Nevertheless, terms of reference of the commission contain two provisions that limit the scope of action in its work. The first refers to the extension of a research period from 1946 to 1988 (when the current constitution was adopted), rather than from 1964 to 1985, the period of military dictatorship. The other provision is that the commission has no authority to bring cases to the court. Such a provision has been strongly criticized by several civil society organizations.

Altmann evaluated the meeting as positive, both with the minister and other cabinet members. "The WCC and the Brazilian ecumenical movement may have a kairos for a new contribution in the field of human rights in Brazil. The country has progressed in many areas, economically and socially, but is still very much behind neighbouring countries in disclosing the tragic events of our past during the military dictatorship."

"On the basis of past experience, particularly with the project BNM, we may have an opportunity to contribute significantly to a process of searching for truth in Brazil. The commission on truth is an opportunity and a significant step in the field of human rights," he said.

- **Letter of condolence and concern from WCC general secretary to H.E. President Dilma Rousseff over the death of 230 students in the Santa Maria fire incident, 30 January 2013**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of 347 churches and denominations, we express to you our most sincere condolences for the tragic deaths of 231 people, many of them university students, who were killed as the result of a fire at a night club in the southern city of Santa Maria on Sunday, January 27th.

Our prayers are with you as a nation mourning the deaths of those young Brazilians, particularly those supporting all the people affected, including the churches of different confessions, which are providing the necessary accompaniment to families affected by the tragedy. We received testimonies from our member churches in Brazil reporting the ecumenical pastoral efforts being made locally and nationally. Such initiatives are a clear signal of the Christian unity and solidarity that we confess in our work worldwide.

We have also heard about and commend the intense efforts of your government to relieve the suffering of the families and to provide the indispensable care for those who are still hospitalized, and pray for their full recovery.

As the Psalmist expresses, “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8). May the Lord continue to comfort your nation and your people in this time of mourning!

Sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Chile

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Dr Michelle Bachelet, president of Chile, offering condolences to the people of Chile after a powerful earthquake struck along the central coastline of the country, 1 March 2010**

Su Excelencia,

Mientras el pueblo chileno hace duelo por la muerte de cientos de chilenos a causa del reciente terremoto, quiero expresar, en nombre del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias, nuestras oraciones y nuestra profunda solidaridad con Usted, los familiares y amigos de las víctimas y el pueblo chileno en su conjunto.

Si bien Chile está a menudo expuesto a los terremotos y sabe lo vulnerable que es ante estos fenómenos, este terremoto ha sido uno de los más grandes que ha sacudido a Chile, matando a cientos de personas y afectando a más de 2 millones, con medio millón de casas destruidas. Celebro la respuesta inmediata adoptada por su gobierno, así como los ofrecimientos realizados por las Naciones Unidas y varios países.

En una situación como tal, como iglesias sabemos que junto con la respuesta de emergencia, el acompañamiento pastoral es urgente. Las iglesias desempeñan un papel crucial de acompañar al pueblo, orar con él, fortalecer su lucha y resiliencia y reconstruir la esperanza. El Consejo Mundial de Iglesias insta a las iglesias a celebrar vigilias y cultos especiales para unirse en oración a Dios. Como el salmista expresa, Dios es nuestro refugio y salvación, incluso cuando la tierra se estremece y tiembla y los cimientos de las montañas se sacuden (Salmo 18: 2. 7).

El movimiento ecuménico ya está respondiendo a esta emergencia a través del trabajo desarrollado por el Servicio Mundial de Iglesias (Church World Service - CWS), en nombre de la Alianza ACT (Action by Churches Together). A través de contrapartes locales, CWS proporcionará ayuda de emergencia a través de alimentos, agua y abrigo.

A la vez que le aseguro nuestras oraciones por el pueblo chileno en estos tiempos difíciles, hago un llamado a las iglesias y ministerios especializados a que ofrezcan todo su apoyo a la tarea que hay que realizar.

Le saluda atentamente,
Reverendo Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
Secretario general

- **Rev. Charles Harper, former director of the WCC's Human Rights Office for Latin America from 1973 to 1992, was decorated with the Orden de Bernardo O'Higgins by Chile for his defence of human rights during the military dictatorship in Chile, 4 March 2010**

Rev. Charles Harper, emblematic figure of the struggle for human rights in the ecumenical movement, was decorated with the Orden de Bernardo O'Higgins by the Republic of Chile.

"With this award, my country wants to thank you for your work in defence of human rights and, fundamentally, for everything that you and the World Council of Churches did for so many people who suffered during the military dictatorship", said the Chilean representative to the international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Carlos Portales at the ceremony that took place in Geneva, Switzerland on 4 March.

The Chilean representative remembered that, immediately after the military coup of September 1973, the Chilean churches developed "the most important work in defence of so many people persecuted during the military regime".

These churches and entities like the Committee Pro Paz and the Vicariate of the Solidarity "undertook the legal defence of persecuted people and constituted a fundamental part of the historical memory of the violations of human rights during the military regime", he said.

Charles Harper, a retired Presbyterian clergyman of dual Brazilian and United States citizenship, directed the Human Rights Resource Office for Latin America of the World Council of Churches from 1973 to 1992.

"In September of 1973 there was an earthquake in Chile, a political and military earthquake originated in human evil, in profound sin, which brought about desperation, death and suffering. An earthquake that woke up the sensibility and the conscience of peoples and nations in the world", said Harper.

The response of the World Council of Churches and the world-wide community of churches was a systematic and energetic denunciation in international forums of the human rights violations by the military regime in Chile.

The Rev. Dr Emilio Castro, who was WCC general secretary between 1984 and 1992 and attended the 4 March ceremony alongside the current WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, had been decorated with the Orden de Bernardo O'Higgins last October.

Colombia

- **Minute on violence in Colombia adopted by the WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010**

Colombia is currently facing one of the world's most serious humanitarian crises. As a result of the civil conflict lasting over five decades, thousands of people have lost their lives;

millions are being forcibly displaced, mostly Indigenous People, Afro-Colombians and farmers, as they are forced to leave their communities due to the wide spread of violence. Human rights defenders, trade-unionists, church and community leaders who dare to raise their voices denouncing the violence committed by the armed groups often become victims of enforced disappearances and killings.

Unfortunately, the situation remains unchanged. Killings, enforced disappearances, flagrant violations of human rights and impunity continue to prevail in the county. The Universal Periodic Review of Colombia by the UN Human Rights Council, held in December 2008, noted the deteriorating situation. Each individual state has a primary responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The Colombian government should take action against threats of massive human rights violations and other large-scale acts of violence against civilians. It should show full respect for international humanitarian law and human rights while promoting dialogue and negotiations for the achievement of lasting peace.

The World Council of Churches has a long history of accompaniment of the Colombian people in their struggle for an end to the armed conflict and to widespread conditions of impunity. Over the last decades, several consultations were organized; public statements condemning the violence were issued, and solidarity visits have taken place. Colombia was one of the focus themes of the United Nations Advocacy Week (UNAW) organized by the WCC in November 2009. During the UNAW, Colombian church leaders and ecumenical partners delved deeply into the tragedies and injustices of the ongoing bloody conflict in Colombia and reflected on ways to move forward to end the violence. A call was made by the participants to explore possible actions to accompany the churches and the people of Colombia in their struggle.

The World Council of Churches is of the opinion that the violent conflict in Colombia can be overcome only through dialogue and political negotiations. A statement on violence in Colombia, adopted by the WCC central committee (Geneva, 26 August-3 September 2002) affirmed that, “for the Colombian Churches and other civil society organizations, the root of the conflict does not lie in the drug-trafficking or in the violence of the armed guerrilla movements (though these too are to be held to account), but in the long history of social injustice, the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the few, competition for control of potentially rich oil fields and a social structure built on the pillars of exclusion, inequalities and impunity”.

The executive committee, meeting in Geneva 23-26 February 2010, therefore:

Reiterates its expressions of solidarity and prayers for the Colombian people, especially the families of those who were killed, disappeared or displaced;

Appreciates the courageous work for peace and witness of the Colombian churches;

Urges religious leaders in Colombia to continue their efforts in promoting a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the disarming of the paramilitary and the restoration of the rule of law;

Reminds member churches and related agencies to address the urgent situation in Colombia;

Expresses deep appreciation to all who have already made Colombian peace initiatives a priority;

Requests prayers and actions of concrete solidarity and exploration of possibilities for accompaniment programmes to support the churches and people in their peace work;

Encourages churches to advocate for the full respect of the human rights of Colombian citizens and to support actions aimed at putting an end to impunity, such as the preliminary investigation in Colombia that was launched by the International Criminal Court;

Requests the churches in the United States of America to press their government for an immediate cessation of "Plan Colombia", and for foreign assistance to Colombia to be redirected from military to humanitarian purposes and for a renewed emphasis on strengthening respect for human rights in the country;

Requests WCC staff to continue and strengthen its advocacy efforts to support peace and reconciliation in cooperation with the Colombian churches, Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and other ecumenical partners.

- **Statement on the situation in Colombia adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011**

Colombia has been witnessing a protracted internal armed conflict for more than half a century. Violence has caused the death of thousands of people, while more than four million have been internally displaced and continue to be displaced. Indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, farmers, human rights defenders, journalists, trade-unionists, and church and community leaders seeking land restitution and justice often become victims of enforced disappearances and killings. Serious human rights violations and abuses by the army and different armed groups, such as the guerrillas and successor groups to paramilitaries, have continued throughout 2010.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Navanethem Pillay, in her 2010 report on the situation of human rights defenders in Colombia expressed deep concern over the increased threats and stigmatization of several categories of human right defenders by public officials and non-state actors. She pointed to cases of killings, threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions, sexual offences, break-ins into homes and offices, illegal surveillance by state intelligence services and information theft directed against human rights defenders. These have been attributed to members of illegal armed groups that emerged from the paramilitary demobilization and guerrilla groups, in particular the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP), as well as, in some cases, members of security forces.

In August 2010 President Juan Manuel Santos succeeded President Alvaro Uribe, whose administration was marked by extensive human rights violations, including the victimization of opposition politicians, Supreme Court judges and journalists. The new administration has taken some positive steps on the legislative level with regard to land restitution and compensation to victims of abuses by state agents. President Santos has publicly denounced abuses and threats against human rights defenders and highlighted the need for an independent judiciary and respect for the rule of law. Although these are positive steps, they are not sufficient enough to respond in an efficient way to the ongoing abuses. The new administration has to prove in a much more concrete way its decisiveness and will to tackle

the crisis and reach a peaceful solution to the armed conflict that has ravaged the social fabric of Colombian society.

The Latin America Regional Group meeting of the WCC and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), held in Bogota, Colombia in 2009, called for increased international ecumenical accompaniment. Colombia was also a focus of the WCC's United Nation's Advocacy Week in 2009. The executive committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) which met on 23-26 February 2010 in Bossey, Switzerland, issued a minute on the situation in Colombia. The WCC has a long history of accompaniment with the Colombian people in their struggle for an end to the armed conflict as "justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has fallen in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey" (Isaiah 59: 14-15). The WCC has been engaged in programmes promoting peace with justice and reconciliation; human rights; and addressing the question of widespread impunity. In its minute, the executive committee reiterated WCC's solidarity and prayers for the Colombian people, but at the same time it called for the development of accompaniment programmes to support the churches and people in Colombia in their peace and reconciliation efforts.

Furthermore, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC in its meeting at St Vlash Monastery in Durres, Albania, 2-8 October 2010, recommended that a programme for ecumenical accompaniment in Colombia be established. Responding to this call, the WCC organized in December 2010 in Geneva a consultation on Colombia where representatives from Colombian churches, CLAI and ecumenical organizations in Europe and North America participated and reflected on possible responses to the Colombian crisis. The consultation acknowledged the importance of a Biblical and theological perspective: the solidarity of God with those who suffer. It discussed the possibility of launching an accompaniment programme whose long-term goals would be to protect social leaders and their organizations and communities, strengthen the capacities of various groups for advocacy, reduce fears in their communities, especially those "returning", and empowering victims. The consultation also proposed the creation of an Ecumenical Forum on Colombia made up of churches, ecumenical groups, and local civil-society organizations. It was decided that an international consultation with national, regional and international ecumenical partners be organized in Colombia in 2011, in order to discuss more specific action plans and appropriate steps to be taken in the near future together with CLAI.

The WCC central committee, meeting in Geneva 16-22 February 2011, therefore:

1. ***Calls*** upon all parties to the conflict in Colombia to fully abide by international human rights law and international humanitarian law, respecting the life, integrity and property of the civilian population;

2. ***Urges*** the Colombian government to continue the necessary normative and policy changes(or advances) and take specific measures to ensure the investigation, prosecution and punishment of those state and non-state actors responsible for human rights violations against civilians;

3. ***Commends*** the work of the Colombian churches and civil society organizations in their efforts to promote peace in Colombia and highlights the need to put an end to the conflict through supporting and promoting platforms for peaceful dialogues and political negotiations while promoting a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the disarming of the paramilitary and the restoration of the rule of law;

4. ***Reaffirms*** its expressions of solidarity and prayers for the Colombian people, especially the families of those who were killed, disappeared or displaced and expresses deep appreciation to all who have already made Colombian peace initiatives a priority;

5. ***Appeals*** to governments to assess the impact of trade provisions on human rights before they enter into a free trade agreement (FTA) with Colombia and to adopt sustainable policies that give particular attention to the protection of farmers, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and trade-unionists, as their rights are being highly impacted by the presence of transnational corporations in the country;

6. ***Reiterates*** the request to the government of the United States of America for an immediate cessation of "Plan Colombia", and for foreign assistance to Colombia to be redirected from military to humanitarian purposes and for a renewed emphasis on strengthening respect for human rights in the country;

7. ***Requests*** the WCC to take necessary steps to organize together with CLAI an international consultation in Colombia with the participation of churches, ecumenical development agencies, national, regional and international ecumenical organizations and local civil society representatives in order to explore the possibility for an accompaniment programme and/or an Ecumenical Forum to support the churches and people in Colombia in their peace work.

- **Letter from WCC associate general secretary to H.E. Juan Manual Santos, president of the Republic of Colombia, expressing concern about death threats against human rights defenders and partners in Colombia, 9 July 2012**

Your Excellency,

It is with great concern that the World Council of Churches has been informed of a serious death threat to human rights defenders and partners in Colombia. Thirteen human rights defenders are named in this threat received by the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE) on July 4. Among them is Prof. Lilia Solano, director of the Justice and Life Project, and coordinator of the Camillo Torres Restrepo Chair at the Faculty of Law and Political and Social Sciences at the National University of Colombia.

The death threat is staggering. It includes photographs of 13 well-known human rights defenders and describes them as "guerrillas" who are "military objectives", stating that there are clear instructions to eliminate them.

Prof. Solano is a respected member of the international ecumenical movement. Her training in philosophy and political science is accompanied by her outstanding Christian commitment and courageous witness in the struggle for life, peace and justice in Colombia. She has been invited on numerous occasions by the World Council of Churches, and in particular our Commission on International Affairs, to take part in different events organized in Geneva, New York and elsewhere in the world. On every occasion we have appreciated her intellectual capability and her ethical honesty in defending human dignity in Colombia.

Along with Lilia Solano, others named are highly respected human rights defenders with whom WCC member churches have worked with over the years, including: Former Senator

Piedad Córdoba and Gloria Cuartas of Colombians for Peace(a movement in which Solano also participates), MOVICE founder Iván Cepeda and MOVICE members Juan Díaz Chamorro,Pedro Geneyand Jeison Paba, Diego Martínez, executive secretary of the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CPDH), staff of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective (CCAJAR):Yessica Hoyosand Soraya Gutiérrez (also a vice-president of the International Human Rights Federation, FIDH), Franklin Castañeda and José Humberto Torresof the Foundation Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSPP), Ayda Quilcué, a leader of the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC). (Quilcué was also threatened on June 20 in a text message to her cell phone. On that same day, members of the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace also received death threats).

Such threats seriously impede the work of human rights defenders in Colombia by creating a widespread climate of fear. It is for this reason your Excellency, that the World Council of Churches would like to call on the Colombian government to take all necessary measures to effectively protect the life and physical integrity of Prof. Lilia Solano and of all other human rights defenders under threat; to carry out an independent and impartial investigation into the authors of these threats with due trial and appropriate penalties; to be mindful of its obligations with respect to the security and protection of those working for the defence of human rights, and in the light of this, to take the immediate and effective measures necessary to ensure that Prof. Solano and the members of the Justice and Life Project can continue their work of defending human rights and human dignity, without danger and stigmatization.

Sincerely yours,
Dr Rogate Mshana
WCC associate general secretary

cc H.E. Federico Renjifo Vélez, minister of Interior and Justice

Cuba

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to President Barack Obama, president of the United States of America (U.S.A.) and Mrs Michelle Obama, asking that the spouses of two Cubans imprisoned in the U.S.A. be allowed to visit their husbands, 19 March 2010**

Dear President Obama, dear Mrs Obama,

Please receive warm greetings on behalf of the World Council of Churches.

Today, we received a visit by Ms Adriana Pérez Oconor and Ms Olga Salanueva at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. They are the spouses of Mr Gerardo Hernández and Mr René González respectively, who are imprisoned in the United States of America, the former with two life sentences plus fifteen years in prison and the latter with fifteen years imprisonment. Ms Pérez Oconor and Ms Salanueva have applied for temporary visas at the U.S. Interest Section in Havana, Cuba on various occasions and they have systematically been denied them. In the case of Ms Pérez Oconor, she has not been able to visit her husband for twelve years and, in the case of Ms Salanueva, for ten years.

From the very beginning of their sentences, in 1998, the WCC has offered them pastoral accompaniment and will continue to do so as they continue to try and visit their spouses. Both Ms Pérez Oconor and Ms Salanueva have once again requested WCC's intervention to facilitate the issuance of temporary visas on humanitarian grounds. Therefore, we are kindly requesting that the above-mentioned visas may be granted to them.

The prisoners, as well as their wives, need at the very least to be able to see each other and receive pastoral care in these difficult and uncertain circumstances. In this regard, several pastors in the U.S.A., inspired by the words found in Mathews 25:36, have visited the prisoners and have offered to escort the wives to see their husbands in the prisons if the visas are granted.

We thank you in advance for all your efforts to achieve this important goal.

Gratefully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

cc: Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary
National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. John L. McCullough, executive director and CEO of Church World Service and Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. regarding their request to President Barack Obama that religious travel restrictions to Cuba be lifted, 6 May 2010**

Dear John and Michael,

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephes. 1:2).

We received with great appreciation the copy of the letter both of you sent to President Barack Obama requesting the end of restrictions on religious travel to Cuba. This fair request has been consistent with the will of many churches, councils and ecumenical organizations both in Cuba and the United States, as well as in the worldwide ecumenical movement, for half a century. Therefore, it has been consistent with the policy and vision of the World Council of Churches, by which the church is the Body of Christ globally and when we are preventing its members to relate to each other, we are attempting against Christ himself. As the Apostle Paul says in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1Cor. 12:12).

Hence, this is a matter that involves the church in both countries and globally. By lifting the travel restrictions, God's Mission will be carried out in mutuality and in partnership, by which both countries will benefit. The U.S. churches will continue to have the opportunity of supporting the work of the churches in Cuba while receiving the benefits of the faithful testimony of the Christians in the Caribbean island, which has been forged in difficult

circumstances. By lifting the travel restrictions on both sides, our brothers and sisters can continue to be the agents of healing, reconciliation and transformation more freely in both contexts.

As we keep on praying for your ministry among the people in the U.S.A. and in many parts of the world, we pray and hope that this request will achieve the results expected by all of us.

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Resolution urging improved United States-Cuba relations and lifting of economic sanctions, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

Long-standing, complex issues of United States of America (U.S.)-Cuba relations, affecting the people of both countries, have drawn the attention of the participants of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Relations between the U.S. and Cuba have been strained by tensions and confrontations since the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The long-standing U.S. embargo was reinforced in October 1992 by the Cuban Democracy Act and in 1996 by the Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Act. These acts prohibited U.S. companies' foreign-based subsidiaries from trading with Cuba, U.S. citizens' travel to Cuba and foreign remittances to Cuba.

On 21 October 2013, 21 leaders of various Christian denominations in the U.S. addressed a letter to the U.S. president, urging the U.S. to take concrete actions pursuing a path toward improved relations with Cuba. The letter specifically urged the president of the U.S. to initiate direct, high-level dialogue with the Cuban government; to remove Cuba from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism; and to lift all restrictions on people-to-people travel between the U.S. and Cuba. The delegates of the 10th Assembly of the WCC endorse the opinion of the U.S. church leaders and the concerns and recommendations expressed by them.

The delegates of the assembly also noted that the United Nations General Assembly, on 29 October 2013, voted overwhelmingly for the twenty-second time to condemn the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba. We believe that the economic, commercial and financial blockade against any country causes enormous pain to its people, especially the poor and vulnerable. In this context, the delegates of the 10th Assembly of the WCC urge the U.S. government to lift the economic sanctions against Cuba and to normalize relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

Guatemala

- **Communiqué adopted at the WCC consultation on peace and human security in Latin America, organized by the WCC/CCIA in Antigua, Guatemala, 6 December 2012**

We the participants of the Latin America regional consultation on 'Peace and Human Security in Latin America: Ecumenical Responses' (Antigua, Guatemala; 30 November to 2 December, 2012), organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in cooperation with the Latin America Council of Churches (CLAI), and hosted by the *Concejo Ecumenico Cristiano de Guatemala*, representing various churches, ecumenical organizations, institutions and civil society movements, thank God for the opportunities for prayer, discernment and dialogue that helped us define and understand the situations which threaten peace and human security in Latin America.

We identified the current realities in the region which affect the dignity of millions of people in Latin America, such as human insecurity, poverty, unemployment, 'femicide', discrimination and exclusion of indigenous people and migrants from the main stream of society, violence, and organized crime orchestrated by drug trafficking groups, and violence against children and young people, all marked by impunity. The policies of militarization as a response to the actions of organized crime and drug trafficking not only failed but they have increased the violence indexes and definitively benefit the dominant groups and institutions.

We heard stories of situations of social insecurity as a phenomenon that calls for urgent attention, requiring the implementation of public, national and regional policies in which Latin American countries should take on their responsibilities and commitments that promote the integrity of persons and communities. We also heard about situations in different countries of Latin America where the state has failed to guarantee peoples' rights to education, health, social security, jobs, justice and opportunities for social and cultural development as well as their fundamental rights. Inequality in the distribution of wealth, social exclusion and the risky situation that the most vulnerable populations find themselves in, destroy the pillars of democracy and the values of fullness of life (John 10:10) that Jesus Christ taught us.

We believe that it is necessary to approach and address these problems through structural reforms in the economic and social spheres. The states have the obligation to guarantee the implementation and full enjoyment of human rights by all citizens. We demand public policies that assure their implementation through internal mechanisms of protection that safeguard life, human security and human development. We also affirm our conviction that truth, justice, and protection of human rights should be guaranteed. The strengthening of the Inter-American System of Human Rights and the international human rights protection mechanisms is unavoidable. International cooperation and the building of a critical overview of international law are contributions that must come from the states and the civil society.

We firmly welcome the beginning of the peace talks between the government of Colombia and the FARC. We support the aspirations of the people of Colombia to achieve peace with social justice, an objective that is of interest to our entire continent, and we urge for a bilateral cease fire during the peace talks.

We express a special concern about the threats to the territorial and economic sovereignty that different countries of the region have suffered. Under the pretext of security policies, U.S military bases have been installed, and are used to control the region. We condemn the negative policies of the government of the United States towards Cuba, especially the economic sanctions imposed against the country, which constitute a threat to peace and a manifestation of a policy of interference to peoples' right to self-determination.

We demand that the states of Latin America assure the integral protection of human rights defenders in the region. The tasks of human rights defenders, in monitoring, denouncing and proposing public policies, must be free of pressures and threats. We consider aberrant the criminalization of social protest and we demand that the peoples' right to freedom of expression should be respected.

Appropriate attention should be given to the situation of vulnerability in which the people of African descent, who constitute a large portion of the population of Central and South America, find themselves and also to the situation of increasing extra-judicial killings of young people. The situations of discrimination and exclusion in which women, children, youth and migrants in our region live are unacceptable. The states must work hard to assure their safety and put all their effort in the eradication of gender violence, and its most serious expression, that of 'femicide' as well as hate crimes, a phenomenon that prevails and increases in Latin American countries. In many countries in the region there are still cases of political prisoners, many of whom are subjected to torture. The existence of penitentiary systems in several countries that violate human rights and democratic governance must also be challenged. In many countries in the region there are still cases of political prisoners, many of whom are subjected to torture.

We affirm that the situation of discrimination and systematic attack against indigenous people still persists. It is unacceptable that transnational corporations devastate their territories, extract the wealth of their land and destroy the natural resources. The economic ventures of the transnational corporations and local projects that are generated in ancestral indigenous lands must be done in consultation with the people, as it is stipulated by the Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization and also the International Declaration of Indigenous People.

While acknowledging the historical contributions of the WCC and the ecumenical movement in supporting the struggles of the people in Latin America for human rights and democratization, we urge the WCC to address emerging concerns related to peace and human security in the region. We acknowledge the efforts carried out by churches in the active defence of human rights. The churches are called to support decisively the people of God in their demands, needs and the construction of a society of peace. Collecting the clamor of the people contributing generously to the social transformation and of the structures, Yahve said: "I have seen the humiliation of my people and have heard their screams when their masters mistreat them. I know their sufferings. I have come down to free them of the power of the Egyptians and to make them rise from here to a large and fertile country, a land that is rich in milk and honey" (Ex 3:7 and 8)

Committed to the Gospel of Christ and the ethical-social imperatives, we assume the urgency of deepening our vocation of peace and continue to work in the heart of our communities for the overcoming of violence, discrimination, all types of exclusion, injustice, inequalities and

for the construction of 'The Kingdom of God'. We believe, as prophet Isaiah proclaimed: "The work of justice will be Peace and the fruits of justice will be tranquility and security forever (Isaiah 32:17).

We pray together with the global ecumenical family, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace".

Haïti

- **Statement by WCC general secretary expressing condolences and solidarity with the people of Haïti following the major earthquake, 13 January 2010**

Churches mobilize support for Haïti quake victims

The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit has expressed condolences and solidarity with the people of Haïti after the earthquake there and has called for prompt support in the relief efforts.

The major earthquake that shook the Caribbean nation of Haïti overnight has become yet another in a series of natural disasters to hit this already vulnerable nation, the poorest in the western hemisphere.

The temblor, which registered 7.3 on the Richter scale and struck the area in around the capital Port-au-Prince on Tuesday, 12 January, around 5 p.m., caused heavy damage knocking down buildings and power lines.

"On behalf of the fellowship of churches of the World Council of Churches, I express our condolences and solidarity with the people of Haïti, as they once again experience the great burdens of anguish, damage, and death because of a natural catastrophe," said Tveit. "They already have carried many burdens of political instability and poverty."

In 2004 more than 3,000 people died because of Hurricane Jeanne which passed over the northwest city of Gonaives. This same area was hit again in 2008 when four tropical storm systems passed through the region.

In 2004 political instability led to the ousting of the President Jean-Baptiste Aristide. And in November 2008, a school collapse which was blamed on poor construction killed 90 people. Nearly 80 percent of Haitians live in poverty.

"The people of Haïti should now experience the prompt support and help from others," Tveit said early Wednesday morning. "Also through the work of the ACT Alliance there will be given support as expression of the actions of churches together worldwide."

"Let us keep our member churches in Haïti and all affected by the earthquake in our prayers and thoughts," he said.

Officials with Action by Churches Together (ACT), a global alliance of churches and related agencies working to save lives and support communities in emergencies worldwide, said ACT

member churches are already involved in responding to the earthquake. The ACT secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, is now coordinating a global response to the catastrophe.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Gerard Granado, general secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) regarding the need for collaboration to bring real and lasting development to Haïti, 22 January 2010**

Dear Gerard,

Warm greetings from Geneva in the name of Jesus Christ!

First of all, I would like to greet you as the newly elected general secretary of the WCC and to reaffirm my commitment to continue working with you and the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) to further strengthen our mutually beneficial and historic ties with the goal of promoting the ecumenical vision both in the Caribbean and globally.

As you know, we are following the situation in Haïti very closely in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake. I am extremely grateful for your message sent in appreciation to our initial response. I am particularly thankful for the statement issued by the CCC on 15 January. We at the WCC fully agree with your comments on the need to collaborate to bring about real and lasting development of this impoverished nation, beyond the current emergency efforts.

In a meeting with the leadership of the new ACT Alliance immediately following the earthquake, we identified the following needs:

1. For the WCC and ACT to work together more closely in general and particularly in the case of Haïti. At this stage, we are therefore supporting the efforts carried out by ACT Alliance, both in this current emergency stage to save lives and support communities in the country as well as in the long-term diaconal work and development of the country, which will include advocacy work (e.g. support to campaign for the cancelation of Haïti's foreign dept, etc.)

2. To work in close contact with our member churches and partners locally (with the Federation of Protestant Churches, etc.) and regionally (with the Caribbean Conference of Churches and the Latin American Council of Churches) to address the needs of the people.

3. To support the victims through pastoral care and social assistance and healing the traumatized. To continue to pray for all these efforts in our struggle for life. In this regard, last Friday, 15 January, we had a moving service of prayer for the people of Haïti in the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre, where an offering was collected.

4. To continue to work with other churches (e.g. Roman Catholic) and partners in the civil society and with the UN.

5. To support the work of the churches and ecumenical agencies in the reconstruction of the infrastructure of the country, including the construction of church buildings.

We at the WCC, including the staff, the Caribbean central committee members, and the WCC president in the region, Rev. Dr Ofelia Ortega Suárez, very much look forward to continuing to work directly with the Caribbean Conference of Churches and other partners helping to share with our brother and sisters in Haïti the "abundant life" which our Lord Jesus Christ intends for all of creation.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement by WCC general secretary calling on the international community regarding the urgent need to cancel Haïti's foreign debt, 25 January 2010**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) continues to call for the immediate and unconditional cancellation of Haïti's foreign debt. Debt cancellation for Haïti would be a critical step in a larger plan for recovery, poverty eradication, and sustainable development that must be developed with the full ownership of the people of Haïti and with the support of the international community under the coordination of the United Nations.

The strong earthquake that hit the small Caribbean nation of Haïti last 12 January 2010 has brought enormous loss of life and indescribable devastation. Thousands of families have lost their loved ones, their homes, and their livelihoods. The WCC commends the ACT Alliance, the United Nations and other governmental and nongovernmental relief organizations that have responded to the crisis with compassion and effectiveness.

Haïti is the most impoverished nation in the western hemisphere. Even before the earthquake struck, there was much hunger and suffering. Seven out of ten Haitians were "subsisting" below the poverty line. Half of the population could not read nor write. One out of nine children would die before reaching his or her fifth birthday.

Haïti is also a heavily indebted country. The worldwide community of churches and church-related organizations has been relentlessly campaigning for the annulment of Haïti's debt for many years. These efforts have borne fruit. In June 2009, major financial institutions wrote off 1.2 billion U.S. dollars in Haïti's debt. Still, the country continues to owe around 641 million U.S. dollars – nearly a quarter of the national output – to multilateral banks such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as to Taiwan and Venezuela.

Rooted in its colonial past, the bulk of the debt accumulated by Haïti is patently onerous and odious. In 1825, the former slave colony was compelled to pay 150 million francs (equivalent to 20-21 billion U.S. dollars in today's dollars) to its former colonizer, France, in exchange for its freedom. The payment was financed through a loan from a designated French bank and marked the beginning of the country's debt bondage.

Moreover, more than half of Haïti's debt stemmed from loans extended to the brutal father-son dictatorship of Francois ('Papa Doc') and Jean-Claude Duvalier. Many of these loans did

not benefit the people of Haïti. The Duvaliers appropriated tens of millions from the national treasury in their almost 30-year stay in power from 1957-1986.

Haïti has been paying around 50 million U.S. dollars a year to merely service interest payments on debt. These monies could have financed feeding programmes for children and built numerous hospitals and schools. This year, Haïti is scheduled to fork out 10 million U.S. dollars to the IDB and IMF.

Obliging Haïti to make debt payments at the expense of health care, education and other critical social programmes is illegitimate. Exacting payment during this time of incredible hardship and destruction is morally untenable.

The WCC therefore calls on the international community, under the leadership of the United Nations, to establish a mechanism for the immediate and full cancellation of Haïti's debt as part of an overall plan to support recovery, poverty eradication and sustainable development in the country.

Debt cancellation is only an initial step. Haïti desperately needs assistance geared towards emergency relief in the short term, and reconstruction and sustainable development in the medium and long term.

Recently, the IMF has offered to extend an interest-free emergency loan to Haïti in the amount of 100 million U.S. dollars and is further mulling a "Marshall Plan" for the country. However, the WCC, together with many civil society organizations and networks, stresses that any financial assistance should come in the shape of grants, not loans that would burden the country with more debt. These grants should be given without imposing detrimental economic policy conditions on the country such as the privatization of public services.

Moreover, a multilateral "Marshall Plan" to rebuild Haïti should be undertaken with the full participation of the Haitian people, employ Haitian talents and industries, and be coordinated by the United Nations.

The WCC welcomes recent pronouncements by the IMF, Taiwan and the Paris Club in support of reviewing Haïti's remaining loans and making Haïti debt-free. We will hold them to their word.

The WCC is hopeful that the community of nations will rise to the challenge and assist in Haïti's recovery in a genuine spirit of justice and caring for our Haitian sisters and brothers.

Justice and care: the situation in Haïti demands nothing less.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Ban Ki-Moon, secretary general of the United Nations, expressing condolences to the staff and families of colleagues based at the UN Mission in Haïti and reiterating the need for the cancellation of Haïti's external debt, 5 February 2010**

Your Excellency,
Dear Mr Secretary General,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

I take this opportunity to express our heart-felt condolences to you and all your staff, the families of your colleagues at the UN Mission in Haïti who lost their lives and to the families of the other UN staff based in Haïti, who are still missing. It is with deep sorrow that I have to write this in my first correspondence with you, as I have just taken over the office as general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). As churches, we believe that the coming of Jesus Christ, as a vulnerable child, which we have celebrated the last weeks, conveys the message to all humanity that God is with us in all depths of life – even death. The events in Haïti have been a hard blow to you and the UN, almost without precedence.

We want to convey to Your Excellency our deep appreciation and respect for the tireless efforts of the United Nations, in the midst of your own losses, under your leadership, in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Haïti. Your expression of solidarity in visiting earthquake-stricken parts of Haïti is much appreciated. In fact, your visit to Haïti is not only a consolation to the people there, but also boosts the morale of the international community as they join hands with all those who are trying to help the people of Haïti at this time of humanitarian crisis and intense suffering.

I was heartened to receive the message that you have taken necessary steps to speed up aid efforts to help people in affected areas and rebuild the devastated areas. The situation in Haïti now warrants a move from the emergency response phase to more ongoing relief, an early recovery and an eventual reconstruction phase of the Haitian economy, your message outlining future priorities to continue to provide humanitarian assistance as well as security and to rebuild the economy of this poverty-stricken country is more than welcome. Your Excellency, we are of the opinion that as Haïti tries to reconstruct itself in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake, the international community needs to work in securing the immediate cancellation of Haïti's external debt and also to ensure that any emergency earthquake assistance is provided in the form of grants and not as debt-incurring loans.

Ever since the news of the earthquake in Haïti was reported, we in the World Council of Churches have been in touch with our friends and colleagues in Haïti and have joined with them, and with WCC member churches all over the world, in prayer. The emergency relief and humanitarian aid arm of the ecumenical movement, the Action By Churches Together (ACT) Alliance, based in Geneva has mobilised resources through its networks in various countries to assist the relief operations and aid assistance in Haïti. Several organizations in our fellowship continue to be engaged in a long term process of joining hands with many others who are extending relief and rehabilitation assistance to Haïti.

On behalf of the WCC once again I offer our prayers and cooperation, and also our appreciation and thanks for your leadership.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letters from the WCC general secretary to leaders of the seven most industrialized countries (G7) welcoming their initiative to write off Haïti's debts, 8-9 February 2010**

The letters were sent to:

- The Honourable James M. Flaherty, finance minister of Canada
- The Honourable Christine Lagarde, minister of economy, industry and employment of France
- H.E. Dr Wolfgang Schäuble, finance minister of Germany
- The Honourable Giulio Tremonti, minister of economy and finance of Italy
- The Honourable Masayuki Naoshima, minister of economy, trade and industry of Japan
- Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling MP, chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom
- H.E. Timothy F. Geither, secretary of the Treasury of the United States of America.

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) I wish to express our appreciation of the decision of the G7 industrialized nations to cancel Haïti's debts incurred to these countries. Sharing your deep concern for the people affected by the devastating earthquake in Haïti and who are struggling to recover and rebuild their country, we welcome this initiative.

We hope that the statement made by the Canadian finance minister, Jim Flaherty, that Haïti's "debt to multilateral institutions should be forgiven and will work with these institutions and other partners to make this happen as soon as possible" will encourage other countries and multilateral institutions to commit to the unconditional cancellation of Haïti's debts.

Your Excellency, the decision of the IMF approving more loans to Haïti after the earthquake will only add to Haïti's burden, nearly doubling the country's debt to that institution, as there is no clear willingness or definitive moves yet to cancel the country's current debt.

It is in this context that the WCC issued a statement on 25 January 2010 calling for the immediate and full cancellation of Haïti's foreign debt as the quake-stricken country needs a broader plan to support recovery, poverty eradication and sustainable development. We take this opportunity to reiterate this call and ask that international financial institutions take urgent measures to cancel Haïti's debts and that all financial support to Haïti be grant-based and non-debt creating.

Following the catastrophic earthquake that struck Haïti on 12 January many of our member churches and networks around the world have participated in the immediate relief efforts. We are all committed to participating in Haïti's long road to recovery and reconstruction. We will continue to be engaged with extending such support to Haïti, particularly through the ACT Alliance, a WCC-partner representing many of our member churches.

Once again, I offer our appreciation for your timely action.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to The Honourable James M. Flaherty, minister of finance of Canada, requesting that Canada take the lead in asking the other G7 nations and the International Monetary Fund to join them in cancelling Haïti's debt, 20 May 2010**

Your Excellency,

Thank you for your letter of May 6, 2010 responding to the call of the World Council of Churches for the cancelling of the external debt for Haïti following the January 12, 2010 earthquake.

We are heartened by the 2009 decisions of the Canadian government to forgive all the debts owed to Canada by Haïti and by the swift and generous response of the Canadian people in meeting the humanitarian needs of the Haitian people immediately following the earthquake.

Canada has shown much appreciated leadership in co-hosting the Montreal Conference to coordinate reconstruction and development.

We welcome the announcement you made in Iqaluit with your fellow G-7 finance ministers that "Haïti's remaining debts to all multilateral institutions should be forgiven and we would work together with these institutions and other partners to make this happen as soon as possible." We are concerned however that after this announcement in February the IMF has still not actually proceeded with the cancelling of the over $270 Million debt. We understand that all the G-7 finance ministers have called on the IMF to find a "technical solution" to cancel the outstanding debt. What is the current situation?

We understand that the IMF has said that the situation is not urgent because no payments are due until 2012. We on the other hand urge Canada as a governor of the IMF to press for an immediate solution and ensure that this outstanding debt does not hang over Haïti's head and create problems in the future.

There is also a pressing concern about IMF conditionality. The IMF has not been forthcoming about the issue of conditionality which has been particularly damaging to Haïti's economy and agricultural production. When the IMF directors met on January 27th to approve a new concessional loan to Haïti an IMF news release said the new loan is "not subject to any additional policy conditions." This could be read to imply that existing conditionalities remain in place. We are concerned about the very important practical and moral question of what conditions will be attached when the IMF does actually cancel the debts owed to it?

We appreciate greatly the leadership Canada has taken in bilateral debt cancellation for Haïti and note that there is still a key role for Canada to play within the G-7 and specifically within

the decision-making structure of the IMF in pressing vigorously for the immediate cancellation of the remaining debt and the release of previously imposed policy conditions for Haïti.

We hope to hear from you in the near future about Canada and the G-7 finance ministers role in ensuring the swift cancellation of Haïti's debt to the IMF and the accompanying policy conditions. The World Council of Churches has joined as a fellowship of churches in praying for and expressing direct solidarity and assistance for the people of Haïti so that they can build their future free from debt and free from crippling conditions. We indeed count on Canada's leadership to help make this a reality.

I will myself, together with a delegation from the World Council of Churches, visit Haïti next July to listen, observe, and to hopefully bring them some signs of our commitment to follow-up the issues dealt with in our correspondence.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Open letter from WCC general secretary to world government leaders and churches around the globe urging that the earthquake reconstruction process not be forgotten, 17 June 2010**

I have just returned from a visit to Haïti, heading an ecumenical delegation of seven brothers and sisters representing the World Council of Churches and churches, councils and conferences of churches in the Latin American and Caribbean regions and France as well as the international ACT (Action by Churches Together) Alliance. The purpose of the visit, which took place during 14-16 June 2010, was again to express solidarity with the victims of the 12 January earthquake, offer pastoral accompaniment, reflect on the main issues in Haïti that confront the world and address the current challenges the churches are facing as they try faithfully to serve the Haitian people, particularly those in greatest need.

I return from Haïti with deep respect for the resilience and the faith of the Haitian people and churches. Now is the time for a new beginning for all in Haïti and this is possible if there is a common will to make it so.

The visit, which was graciously hosted by the Protestant Federation of Haïti, also aimed at helping the ecumenical family to continue advocating and working together with the Haitians in the reconstruction of the country, based on social justice and the self-determination of the population.

As we depart from this beautiful country, so severely hit by injustice, lack of political stability and accountability as well as natural catastrophes over so many years, we say: Let this be the time of a new beginning for all the people of Haïti. In Haïti we see so many from outside coming to give aid and to help. Still, I would like to remind governments and world leaders of the pressing needs in Haïti, and I wish to call upon the member churches and ecumenical partners of the World Council of Church

1. Do not forget the people of Haïti, even though most of the camera lenses have turned elsewhere. Our unity and solidarity with the people of Haïti are vital. It is critical in this phase of reconstruction, after the phase of dire emergency that the persons who are living in tents move to more permanent housing. This is urgently needed, and it is a matter of dignity, sanity and safety, particularly during the hurricane season which has already started. There can be no legitimate reasons for delaying this process, particularly not the lack of access to land for building or a lack of resources. The future of Haïti requires a continued real sharing, nationally and internationally. The poorest people of Haïti have suffered enough,

2. Join in supporting the determined efforts of Haitians as they undertake a reconstruction process. This process must be participatory and fully accountable to those now living in tents, those who struggle to rebuild their lives, those who are still recovering from injuries, those who mourn, those whom Christ numbered among "the least of these, my brothers and sisters" (Mat. 25:45).

It is imperative that we act as one while lending a hand to Haitians who are striving to shape their common future. For churches, it is essential to reflect, in times like these, what it means to be one in Christ, locally, regionally and globally. We are called to unity, to serve as churches who speak with a common voice for justice and who care for the life of our neighbour, and who take common action together with partners such as the ACT Alliance and others.

As we continue our journey together in this spirit, I would like to leave this message with our brothers and sisters in Haïti: "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15: 5-6).

In gratitude and hope,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Nicaragua

- **Declaration at Afro-descendent conference calling for churches to use education against racism, Managua, Nicaragua, 25 June 2011**

In this International Year for People of African Descent declared by the United Nations and the Organization of American States, we, the representatives of churches and ecumenical organizations from Peru, Brazil, Panama, Switzerland, Colombia, Costa Rica, U.S.A., Nicaragua, Venezuela, Canada, Honduras, belonging to the CLAI Afro-descendent pastoral team, working with Afro-descendent communities of Latin America and the Caribbean, and meeting in Managua, Nicaragua from 22 to 25 June 2001, convened by the Latin American Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, after days of deep reflection and guided by the revealing words of our Lord Jesus Christ, considering the reality of racism today in Latin America and the Caribbean and its challenges to our churches and ecumenical organizations, we make the following declaration and proposal:

1. The message of Jesus Christ invites us to continue struggling against social injustices such as racism and social exclusion; they are considered sinful.

2. As churches we are part of the world and we call people to be the salt of the earth in this world.

3. The members of churches and ecumenical organizations present here commit ourselves to carry on working for our churches to have a prophetic voice, which is the churches' vocation.

4. We call on the churches:

a. To commit themselves to make the theme of Afro-descendents run transversally through the curricula at their universities, institutes, seminaries, sunday schools and other places of teaching.

b. To create spaces for dialogue to responsibly take on themes of racism, its manifestations and consequences.

c. To recognize that as Afro-descendents we have a right to express ourselves in church according to our cultural inheritance.

We propose that the Latin American Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations:

1. Promote the participation of the Afro-Descendent pastoral team in international events such as the World Summit of Afro-Descendents to be held from the 18-21 August in the city of La Ceiba, Honduras, and the pre-Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2013.

2. Show real commitment regarding the problem of racism being suffered by around 150 million Afro-descendent citizens in the Americas living in situations of exclusion, marginalization and poverty (statistics from the Economic Commission for Latin America, CEPAL).

3. Open up positions of ecumenical leadership for young Afro-descendent church people to promote generational changes.

4. Forge strategic alliances with ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical institutions and organizations to promote projects and programmes for sustainable development among Afro-descendent communities.

5. Strengthen the Afro-Descendent pastoral team across the continent as part of CLAI's key challenges and recognize the ethical and moral debt to the afro-descendent population.

6. Promote spaces for reflection with the Afro-Descendent pastoral team to contribute to a contextualized theology inspired by the afro reality.

We want to highlight and express our gratitude for the support and solidarity of the following churches and organizms: The Lutheran World Federation, The United Church of Christ of the U.S.A., the United Church of Canada and the Population Fund of the United Nations in Nicaragua.

- **Letter from the director of CCIA to Dr José de la Torre, president, and Mrs Igrí Rivera, president of the Board of Directors of the University of Puerto Rico, calling for steps to end the strike by the student community, 22 June 2010**

Dear Dr de la Torre and Mrs Rivera,

The World Council of Churches has been following the news concerning the situation of unrest in the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) and negotiations between the administration of the University (UPR) and the student community who have been engaged in a strike for the past several weeks. The claims of the students have been subject to debate between the aforementioned parties for several weeks, while the University authorities have closed the gates of 11 different campuses across the island. We have been informed of the violent interventions of the police of Puerto Rico's Tactical Operations Unit as well as the summons pending their negotiation committee to respond in a civil action filed by the UPR administration. We have also learned of the prohibition of students to receive food and water whilst they stay on campus. As you know these acts are violations of basic human rights as per the International Human Rights standards and instruments, such as the Universal Declaration for Human Rights and the International Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights which guarantee, among others things, the right to life and an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to food and water.

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. Normative instruments of the United Nations and UNESCO lay down international legal obligations for the right to education. These instruments promote and develop the right of every person to enjoy access to education of a good quality, without discrimination or exclusion. Governments have the main responsibility to fulfill their legal and political obligations with regard to providing education of good quality for all and to implement and monitor more effectively these education strategies.

We consider that it is important to recognize the present crisis in the University of Puerto Rico as a great opportunity to transform the system of education relevant to the future and the wellbeing of the younger generation in Puerto Rico, we also express our concern at the recent strike situation and along with civil, educational, and religious organizations such as our associate Puerto Rico Council of Churches (PRCC) we ask you to refrain from any legal action against the student leaders. It is in good faith that we ask you to take necessary steps for the resolution of this conflict through dialogue and negotiation in order to avoid any violence. We hope that you will take this opportunity to move towards a more just and peaceful society in Puerto Rico.

Yours sincerely
Mathews George Chunakara
Director, International Affairs

cc. Hon. Luis G. Fortuño, governor, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico
Bishop Felipe Lozada, president, Puerto Rico Council of Churches
Rev. Angel L. Rivera-Agosto, executive secretary, Puerto Rico Council of Churches

Trinidad and Tobago

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Caribbean Conference of Churches in Trinidad and Tobago, invoking prayers for the people affected by Hurricane Sandy, 1 November 2012**

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
Psalm 121:1-2

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Like many around the world, I have observed the tremendous force of Hurricane Sandy that has afflicted millions of people from the Caribbean to the United States of America and into Canada. I understand that such storms are common to island life. Yet with each new storm comes new loss and profound pain. I write to assure you of the prayers of the World Council of Churches for all those who have been affected, particularly those who have lost loved ones or who now find themselves without a home. In this time of recovery when so many local churches are working together to offer emergency relief and support, we see a poignant reminder of how important the common witness and service of the ecumenical family is to our communities.

May the God of Life offer blessing and comfort to those who have suffered loss and those who seek to serve them.

Yours in our common Lord, crucified and risen,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Middle East

- **Minute on the presence and witness of Christians in the Middle East adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011**

Two recent attacks against Christians in their places of worship in the Middle East have raised fears and concerns among churches everywhere. Close on the heels of the brutal attack against Christians praying in churches in Baghdad, Iraq in October 2010 came news that Christians who were praying were subject to an equally vicious and cruel attack in Alexandria, Egypt on New Year's Eve, December, 2010. These two events resulted in a huge public outcry.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), which counts within its fellowship a sizeable number of Churches in the Middle East, several of whom are founding members of the WCC, is alarmed at the nature and consequences of these attacks. An equally major concern is that these incidents are being exploited by some political parties in several countries as well as by some religious groups to fuel islamophobic tendencies and negative images about Islam.

The situation could easily assume detrimental dimensions if, in the name of protecting their future and maintaining their security, the above trends were further advanced. The WCC's approach to the presence and witness of Christians in the Middle East is radically different. Rather than allowing the situation to deteriorate into one of conflict and antagonism towards other citizens in different countries, the imperative is to find ways and means of bringing to the fore a genuine Christian spirit of solidarity.

The WCC seeks to reinforce a positive engagement for churches in the life of the nations to which they belong. The continuous presence and active participation of Christians in the life of the entire region has been a remarkable witness to the Christian faith regardless of the times of torment and suffering at various junctures.

Since its inception, the WCC has viewed the Middle East as a region of special interest, being the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For Christians, the region is the place where our Lord was incarnated and born, preached, suffered crucifixion, and was resurrected. It is also the land from where the Good News was spread to the entire inhabited world. Our living faith has its roots in this land, and is nourished and nurtured by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots from the apostolic times. Without this Christian presence, the conviviality among peoples from different faiths, cultures, civilizations, which is a sign of God's love for all humanity, will be endangered. In addition, its extinction will be a sign of failure of the ecumenical family to express the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity.

Christians in the Middle East are facing unprecedented challenges now, and are attempting to respond through new forms of witness. They are more aware than ever that when they express together a common vision about their role in society and deliver a unified message, their voice is better heard and their presence and impact in their societies is more appreciated.

In the birthplace of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians have come together from all church traditions and expressed their common word of "faith, hope and love" from the "heart of their suffering". The *Kairos Palestine* document challenges the ecumenical family and the international community to put an end to the Israeli occupation. It is a call to the Palestinian community to remain steadfast in their land, witnessing to God's love for all, while peacefully resisting the evil of occupation. The community is a sign of hope for the ecumenical family.

Christians in Iraq have suffered, like all citizens, from the disastrous and tragic consequences of the illegal, immoral, and ill-advised invasion of their country. After several years of occupation, they still lack security, including social security. Facing tremendous challenges, Christians have come together and formed a "Christian Council of church leaders in Iraq" with a vision that is unequivocally committed to the advancement of all Iraqi citizens, aiming at engaging in promoting ecumenical initiatives, dialogue, and partnership with Muslims.

The recent developments in Egypt have demonstrated that the democratic aspirations of a population cannot be suppressed and that the social struggle for transformation can lead to equal citizenship. Christians in Egypt, especially young people, were part of this struggle for dignity and freedom. Despite the recent attacks against them – even in their places of worship – from obscure forces that threaten their stability and dignity, they have remained steadfastand undeterred. They remain resolute and unwavering to make their Christian presence felt through acts of service that are life transforming for individuals and Egyptian society, as for example when Christians recently formed a living circle hand-in-hand for the protection of praying Muslims in Tahrir Square in Cairo.

However, an alarming trend is that in some parts of the region religious minorities, including Christians, do not enjoy equal citizenship and their presence is often challenged by open discrimination, especially when it comes to construction of churches. They continue to face restrictions on their practice of religion, and on their access to places of worship, and sometimes their historical existence is threatened through confiscation of church properties and disrespect of their cultural heritage.

The Middle East Council of Churches exists to be the rallying point that can mobilize churches in the region and provide genuine perspectives to the relations between churches in the region and the rest of the world. The need to maintain and strengthen this ecumenical tool is essential in the face of the increasing challenges and signs of hope that are opening up throughout the region.

Recent political developments in the region point to signs of hope for democratic changes, respect for human rights and the rule of law in several countries. However, the task ahead is arduous. Notions of a comprehensive Just Peace are not anywhere near being realized. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and of other Arab lands remains a source of unrest and tensions in the region and beyond, and a major obstacle to achieving a Just Peace that can bring security, stability, and prosperity to all peoples in the region. For the WCC, it remains a non-negotiable principle that peace and reconciliation must be conditioned by justice.

God's justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths have always guided WCC policy concerning the region. The WCC continues to believe that the core challenge for the churches, but also for the whole ecumenical family, is to witness to God's justice in the midst of unjust occupations, deprivation of freedom, and oppression. The

irrevocable call is to courageously challenge the sources and structures of these injustices, as well as the authorities that perpetuate them.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva from 16 to 22 February 2011, therefore:

1. ***Calls*** for solidarity of WCC member churches with Christians in Iraq in multiple ways including:
   (a) Providing support to the newly formed Christian Council of church leaders in Iraq (CCCLI) so that it grows into a unifying force for churches to act in unity to rebuild war-ravaged Iraqi society;
   (b) Supporting churches to build capacities to serve Iraqi people to rebuild their lives;
   (c) Extending specific cooperation to Christian communities, especially those who have been disadvantaged by the war and occupation, in ways that make them self-reliant and encouraged to remain in Iraq as a continuing sign and affirmation of Christian presence and witness in the country.
   (d) Providing support to Iraqi Christian refugees living in neighbouring countries.

2. ***Urges*** WCC member churches to study and disseminate the *Kairos Palestine* document, and to listen and concretely respond to the Palestinian Christian aspirations and calls expressed in this document.

3. ***Encourages*** WCC member churches to examine and act on the substance and proposals of the conference on "Transforming Communities: Christians and Muslims building a common future" jointly convened by the WCC and a number of international Muslim organizations and networks in November 2010.

4. ***Endorses***the call of this conference for the formation of a joint working group, which can be mobilized whenever a crisis threatens to arise in which Christians and Muslims find themselves in conflict.

5. ***Regards*** current events in various countries in the Middle East as an opportunity for peaceful positive changes in the societies and encourages all people in the region, including Christians, to continue to play their part in the common longing to secure human rights, peace and respect for all people of the region.

6. ***Calls*** for convening an ecumenical international conference in 2012 to address the new challenges Christians are facing in the Middle East, in collaboration with the churches in the region.

7. ***Invites*** churches and their agencies who are engaged in support and solidarity work in the Middle East to provide coordinated support in the re-envisioning and re-invigoration process of the Middle East Council of Churches so that its mission as a unique ecumenical tool rallying and coordinating church witness and action can be fulfilled effectively.

8. ***Prays*** and continues to be involved in proactive ecumenical advocacy in solidarity with the churches in the Middle East.

- **Communiqué adopted at the Christian-Muslim consultation on "Christian presence and witness in the Arab world", Antelias, Lebanon, 27 January 2012**

A Christian-Muslim consultation on Christian presence and witness in the Arab world, in the light of what has come to be currently known as the "Arab Spring" was held between the 24-27 January 2012. The meeting was organized by the World Council of Churches, in collaboration with the Middle East Council of Churches and hosted by the Armenian Catholicosate in Antelias, Lebanon.

Participants came from a number of Middle Eastern countries: Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, UAE, as well as from a small number of churches in the United States, Europe and Pakistan. They included religious leaders, scholars and young people.

During the discussions there was a clear concern, among Christians and Muslims alike, to strive to build diverse societies based on human dignity, drawing their strength from faith in the One True God, Creator of all.

The consultation formed part of a series on ongoing meetings which are aiming to create an appropriate atmosphere for honest and open dialogue, under the eyes of God, for the service of humanity in the region.

The discussions focused on the following three themes:

1. The "Arab Spring" with its consequences for both Christians and Muslims in Arab societies.

2. Present and future citizenship models in the Arab world.

3. Christians and Muslims working together to achieve freedom and justice in the Arab world.

Those present noted the growth of a common hope for a new reality where Arab societies will be built on human dignity, which is the basis for living together, diversity and the respect of others in their otherness.

Participants also expressed their support for peaceful popular movements which are seeking democracy and freedom. Working in such a way can help to achieve the values that those movements are calling for: equality, social justice and citizenship.

There was also insistence on the necessity of respecting the principle of public and individual freedoms in Arab societies. These include political freedom, as well as freedom of thought, opinion and expression, all of which need to be stated in laws guaranteeing their protection. Members of the consultation paid tribute to the role of young people in inducing positive changes in the Arab world.

Participants discussed mechanisms to assist in transforming this "Spring" into a constructive one for Christians and Muslims alike. The following suggestions were proposed during working groups and discussions:

1. To promote the role of religious dialogue in defending human rights; to deal with religious tensions through dialogue in order to solve conflicts; to avoid these religious tensions being used by external actors.

2. To offer space for interaction between young people and religious institutions.

3. To provide media and educational material in order to improve accurate knowledge and common understanding between Christians and Muslims.

Participants also highlighted some topics to be discussed in greater depth during future meetings:

- The role of women in the Arab Spring.
- The attachment of Christians to their homelands and the issue of emigration.
- Issues relating to mission and conversion

Members of the consultation hoped that the changes in the Arab world will result in active movements leading to the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation on the basis proposed by Christian Palestinians in their document "A Moment of Truth".

Participants called on everyone to pray so that, together, we find in our respective spiritual traditions, common space to enable us to fight against repression, poverty and ignorance. So we conclude by paying tribute to one of God's most noble gifts: Human dignity.

- **Statement on asylum-seekers and human trafficking in the Sinai Desert adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012**

1. During the past years thousands of asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa and Northern Africa have disappeared in the Sinai desert region while crossing the border between Egypt and Israel. The Sinai desert is a traditional transit route for people from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Northern African countries escaping political turmoil, hunger and poverty and hoping to end up in Europe. The people of Eritrea have been facing deep political and human rights crises, due to which around 2,000 people are attempting to flee from Eritrea every month. They end up in the hands of human trafficking rackets or fall victim to organ theft. It is out of sheer desperation, in order to escape conflict, political turmoil and deteriorating human rights situations that people take such risky journeys. However, instead of safe passage to Israel, the refugees find themselves in desert detention centres in Sinai, where they are abused in the most dehumanizing manner.

2. A recent report revealed that some people have been held in purpose-built containers for more than a month by Bedouin people-traffickers in an area close to the Israeli border. Their captors, who are demanding payment from each person for release, are subjecting their captives to the most appalling abuse. They are bound by chains around their ankles, deprived of adequate food, given salty drinking water and are subjected to extreme methods of torture including electric shocks and whipping, in order to force payment by friends and families abroad, who are contacted by satellite telephone as the torture is occurring. Some are released and transferred across the border after payment has been made to the traffickers' representatives.

3. Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR-I) recently reported that groups of refugees, mainly from Eritrea, are being held captive by smugglers at torture camps in the El-Arish area, captured while on the journey through the Sinai to Israel. The smugglers are demanding ransoms of thousands of dollars for the release of each captive, from relatives and friends who have reached Israel or are living in the diaspora. Methods used to apply pressure on the captives' relatives to pay include systematic violence and torture of the hostages. According to PHR-I, survivors report the use of violence including rape and sexual abuse. It was also reported that out of 30,000 people who have fled to Israel since 2009, mostly from countries like Tunisia, Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and others, around 10,000 have died on the journey, and 3,000 have fallen prey to the brutal organ theft.

4. A recent report by *Agenzia Habeshia,* an organization monitoring the situation of refuges and asylum seekers, mentions that some 190 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees are now being held captive in two torture camps in Sinai. The traffickers are demanding $10,000 – $30,000 ransom for many of these captives. Other asylum-seekers are kept in jails by the Egyptian government, facing inhuman treatment and living under the menace of forced deportation, which implies a severe threat to their lives.

5. Human trafficking through the Sinai desert and inhuman treatment of refugees and asylum seekers are a matter of serious concern. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches organized a round table discussion in November last year at the Ecumenical Centre on the problem of asylum-seekers who are stranded in the Sinai desert. The discussions during the round table meeting brought out stories on human trafficking and organ theft. The WCC has been challenged to initiate a process of more collaborative actions among churches and civil society organizations for advocacy in support of victims stranded in the Sinai desert.

6. The World Council of Churches has a long history and tradition of advocating for asylum- seekers, refugees and all other uprooted people. Our Christian values and principles challenge us to provide care and attention for the vulnerable. As one of the undeniable values of the Christian faith, it calls us to express and provide loving care to those exposed to threats and uncertainty; and to be the voice of the voiceless and speak out for their rights and dignity.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting at Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012, therefore,

A. ***Calls*** on its member churches, related ecumenical organizations and agencies to raise awareness of the situation of asylum-seekers, especially regarding the problem of human trafficking and organ theft;

B. ***Appeals*** to the WCC member churches, especially the churches in the neighbouring regions, to be engaged in advocacy concerning the inhuman treatment of refugees kept in jails;

C. ***Calls*** on the Egyptian government to prosecute the traffickers and close down their detention sites;

D. ***Encourages*** the Israeli authorities to intensify their efforts in order to apprehend suspects within the state who are cooperating with human traffickers in Sinai who abuse and hold African asylum-seekers for ransom;

E. ***Appeals*** to donors to support the UNHCR in its joint project with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to research the trafficking and kidnapping issue, improve security in the refugee camps and develop local authorities' ability to deal with the problem.

- **Joint statement issued at international ecumenical conference on Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, Notre-Dame du Mont Monastery, Lebanon, 25 May 2013**

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

"Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid."

Preliminary
Gathered in Lebanon, a land that bears the impression of the footsteps of Jesus Christ, a nation in which Christians form an integral and vibrant component of its culture and civil society, a place that is a crossroad of cultures, peoples and religions, the participants in this meeting included leaders and representatives from Christian churches in the Middle East and Christian churches and organizations from 34 other countries, in order to help strengthen the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East for the benefit of unity, justice and peace for all in this crucial region, in times of significant changes for the whole region and for every nation. We meet while neighbouring Syria and the region is experiencing unprecedented political, cultural and historical convulsions, disrupting and endangering the lives of all who live in this region, including Christians.

Participants in this conference, long-scheduled by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) to take place during the Paschal season for the Orthodox participants and at Pentecost according to the Gregorian calendar, arrived at the conference hoping for news of the safe release of the two Archbishops from Aleppo, His Eminence Boulos (Yazigi) Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Alexandretta and His Eminence MorYouhannaGregorios (Ibrahim) Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo in Syria, kidnapped over one month ago. The news of their kidnapping shocked the whole world especially people of this region, and galvanized Christians around the world. But they remain captives, as do hundreds of other kidnapped persons. This reality also represents a symbol pointing to the situation faced by the people of Syria, and throughout the region, and cast long shadows over our consultations – urging us to action, not merely reflection. We pray and hope that their speedy release, and assistance of the leaders of Muslim and Christian communities, will strengthen interreligious co-operation.

Our work together
The conference participants – both from churches of the Middle East and from other parts of the world – have met in order to be the witnesses of our common Christian faith. We believe that the Gospel calls us always to love God and love our neighbours and all people, as did Jesus Christ, the revelation of divine love. In Him, the whole of humanity is reconciled and united in the bond of God's plan of salvation.

The conference has joined together in prayer according to the traditions present and in Bible study and sharing. It has been resourced by a very rich and diverse array of experts from the

region and from abroad, as well as by working document, "Christians in the Middle East: presence and witness" that has provided welcome foundation to our work. Not only by these things, but also by the decades that have preceded this conference have participants been prepared. We are committed to witness together what we have heard, to bear each other's burdens, and to undertake actions that our common Christian identity requires of us.

We acknowledge some fundamental principles underlying our consultations:

1. From the time of Jesus Christ and over the intervening centuries, Christians have been rooted in the soil of the Middle East. The Christians living in this region are an essential part of their lands.
2. Christians in the Middle East have a long history of living inplural societies that respect all diversities, understanding that all people are created by God. The teaching of Jesus Christ is that no violence is acceptable, particularly violence that is committed in the name of religion. The Gospel-rooted imperative of witness and service to the neighbour marks the historical role of Christians in the region and in the world.
3. Christians living in the lands of the Middle East reject being labelled "minority" since they reject being understood as a lesser people (*aqalliyya*). They rather understand themselves as full citizens of their nations. States have the responsibility to protect all of their citizens on an equal basis. Numerical proportion historically has not limited the contribution and role of Christians in the East.
4. This is a time of crisis with special intensity here in the Middle East, but affects all of humankind. The elements of this crisis include an intensification of religious tribalism, increasing fundamentalism in many of the world's religions, dispersion of the influence of radicalized Islamist groups, widespread violence and insecurity, a deficit in democratic legitimacy and credibility, poverty and lack of opportunity, especially for women and youth, Christian emigration from the region, and a generalized sense of abandonment following decades of unhelpful intervention. Christians, Muslims and Jews all experience the destructive effects of these trends.
5. Palestine continues to be the central issue in the region. Resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine in accordance with the UN resolutions and international law, will greatly help resolving the other conflicts in the region. The persistence, after sixty-five years, of continuing dispossession of Palestinian people – Christian and Muslim alike – from their land by Israeli occupation, continuing settlement of land inside the 1967 borders by a nation empowered by overwhelming military strength and external alliances and influence, is central to the turmoil in the region and exacerbated by duplicity of policies of the western powers, especially the United States. Christians have been called to condemn and act against this continuing injustice, affirming the voice and demands of Palestinian Christians, including as heard in the *Kairos Palestine* document.
6. Jerusalem today is an occupied city with a government which has adopted discriminatory policies against Christians and Muslims alike. "Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity. She is the city towards which all people are in movement – and where they will meet in friendship and love in the presence of the One Unique God." (*Kairos Palestine*) Christians look to Jerusalem as a place God blessed with the significance of His presence, a place revered by the faithful of three religions. Jerusalem must be an open, accessible, inclusive and shared city for two peoples and three religions, with careful protection of their holy places. It needs to be the place that models for the world the

possibilities of living together peacefully in mutual respect in accordance with God's plan. We look to Jerusalem to be the symbol of the world as it should be and for which we long.

7. Christians who promote "Christian Zionism" distort the interpretation of the Word of God and the historic connection of Palestinians – Christians and Muslims – to the Holy Land, enable the manipulation of public opinion by Zionist lobbies, and damage intra-Christian relations.

8. Christians must reject Islamophobia, which mischaracterizes Islam as an undifferentiated whole, and undermines decades of cultivation of co-operation with Muslims, and must refuse the temptation to amalgamation, generalization, and sensationalization of our Muslim brothers and sisters.

9. The churches of the Middle East include faithful women, youth, and men as lay members of their congregations. Strengthening the possibilities for lay participation, and witness will strengthen the churches. Empowering women of the region to develop their capacities and to publicly articulate their unique perspectives will enrich society and the churches.

10. Youth have been at the forefront of engaging in the process that continues after the events that roiled Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2011 demonstrating the vital importance of their presence and role in civil society and in the churches. Young people in the Middle East have been engaged in work for a society based upon respect for the human dignity of all persons, human rights, equality, citizenship, the rule of law, freedom and mutual respect. The churches are also challenged to continue to listen to and engage with them in meaningful ways, using their capacities in church and society. Churches may need to reflect on ways that grassroots actions exercised by citizens questioning authority, rejecting corruption and favouritism and eroding traditional tribal cohesion will affect the churches.

11. Governments throughout the region are hearing demands for participation, access, transparency and accountability. The churches in the Middle East are aware that the guarantee of our free and pro-active Christian existence in the region is not a bequest given by political powers, but is acquired by being courageous in exposing the structures and mechanisms of oppressive political systems, and by persistent patience in changing mentalities and structures.

12. The circumstances throughout the Middle East present the churches with a *Kairos* moment, as did South Africa in 1985, and Palestine in 2009, each of which called the churches to prophetic action. This is another time for such action, for a new vision of Christian cooperation in the region, for recommitment to Christian-Muslim engagement, for engagement with Jewish partners also working for peace and justice, expressing our Christian vocations by working together to express mutual support and solidarity, all of which may help to stem the flow of Christians from the region and to eliminate the barriers to full and meaningful lives for Christians in the countries of the Middle East. In the Middle East, Christians understand that "only united can we flourish; divided we vanish."

Call to action

The Christian churches of the Middle East, present through heads of churches and church representatives, representatives of sister Christian churches of the World Council of Churches and ecumenical partners, recognizing this as a *Kairos*moment for the Christians in the Middle East, commit to support one another in steadfast prayer and call for the following actions to support the continuing vital Christian presence and witness in the Middle East.

To the member churches in the region, we encourage you to:

- Recognize and affirm each other and your shared ministry as a sign of the unity for which the Lord prayed *"that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us"* (John 17:21).
- Continue to be being involved in the building of democratic civil societies, based on the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights, including religious freedom.
- Commit to engage together to reinvent, reinvigorate and renew the Middle East Council of Churches, in order to continue being the voice of Middle East Christians to the world, being the trusted source of basic, objective information.
- Reflect on ways that grassroots actions exercised by citizens in their countries questioning authority, rejecting corruption and favouritism and eroding traditional tribal cohesion will affect the churches, in order to understand and participate in the important changes going on.
- Empower women in the churches to develop their capacities and provide opportunities for their meaningful participation in the churches and society.

To the Middle East Council of Churches:

- Include significant roles for young people, developing the capacity of the next generation whilst at the same time enhancing the capacity of the MECC by their gifts and perspectives. Engage with young people in meaningful ways, using their capacities to enhance their participation in the church and society.
- Encourage the process toward developing a *Kairos* statement for the region.
- Envision the role of the MECC to include regional and international advocacy on behalf of the Christians in the region, engaging in theological exchange with ecumenical partners, amplifying the voices of the Christians in the Middle East, including to regional ecumenical organizations and national councils of churches worldwide and inter-governmental institutions.
- Advocate for efforts in education to build a better understanding and respect among the different religions, including revision of textbooks, especially in how they portray other faiths, their history and their beliefs, integrating insights from religious studies and historical research.
- Develop exchange programmes to facilitate the sharing of experiences, information on interfaith relations and dialogue among the churches and religions. Encourage and facilitate responsible pilgrimage to the region.

To the World Council of Churches:

- Recommit itself to working with the MECC as a partner.
- Develop a new vision and theological foundations for WCC engagement with other religions in order to work more directly together for understanding, peace and justice, particularly with respect to areas where political and social tensions have been misidentified as struggles between religions; draw upon the expertise and positive efforts of churches in regions with effective interreligious cooperation.

- Engage on a regional and international level in advocacy on behalf of the Christians in the Middle East, continuing programmes that enhance those efforts (for example, Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel). Also engage in advocacy for all oppressed and marginalized persons in the region.
- Convene the spiritual and academic resources of the WCC and ecumenical partners in consultations to address Christian Zionism, disclosing its sources, its use as a political weapon against the Palestinian people, and its effects on intra-Christian relations.
- Encourage member churches to develop and disseminate educational materials that accurately reflect the geography and history of the Middle East and the realities of sister churches located there.
- Communicate, with ecumenical partners, the dire humanitarian situation within Syria and suffered by refugees from Syria in neighbouring countries, appealing to WCC member churches to interpret their relief policies in ways that deliver resources to the most vulnerable. Seek ways to exert pressure to stop actions of violence.
- Encourage WCC member churches to support measures both to prevent war and to open channels for citizen diplomacy and mutual understanding with Iran. WCC member churches should explore ways to visit their contexts and remain in fellowship with them.
- Encourage WCC member churches to support the churches in Iraq by visiting them in their contexts and remaining in active fellowship with them.

To the MECC and WCC:

- Advocate that churches and nations around the globe ensure that Jerusalem is established as a city of two peoples and three religions with unrestricted and free access for all humankind.
- Advocate for a nuclear-free Middle East.
  Caution and work against any kind of escalation of tensions in the region.
- Encourage the United Nations, United States, European Union and Russia, along with other countries in positions of political power, to create policies that promote peace with justice for all peoples of the region.
- Explore ways to attract to the region resources to provide quality education, development, employment opportunities, including especially decent work for young people, which would counter socioeconomic pushes to emigrate from the Middle East.
- Use re-envisioned instruments of interreligious dialogue and cooperation to raise awareness among Muslim and Christian leaders, including women and youth participation, and leaders of other civil society groups, to accept and respect each other for the sake of mutual benefit and co-existence.
- Appoint a small group including persons from both the MECC and the WCC to further develop the working paper “Christians in the Middle East: Presence and Witness” drawing upon the consultations that took place at this conference to finalize a document can be presented to the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in November 2013 in Busan, South Korea.
- Encourage the participation of women and youth from the region in the Busan assembly.

- **Statement affirming the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013**

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

"Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid."

1. Christians still keep hope

The profound political changes that have swept the Middle East and North Africa, since early 2011 following popular uprisings, have carried with them hopes for political systems based on human rights and the rule of law. The seeds of an irreversible transformation have been sown. However, in several countries the efforts towards political transformation have been rejected, which has undermined the demands for peaceful reform. Quite rapidly, large areas of the Middle East and North Africa have succumbed to violent sectarian, ethnic, and tribal animosities, and the reform movement has been distracted by political radicalism and religious intolerance. This has led to a widespread humanitarian catastrophe. In this critical situation, the worldwide Christian community is enjoined to manifest its solidarity with all peoples in the Middle East who are struggling for just and peaceful societies, and, at the same time, affirms that the continued presence of Christians in this region is indispensable for plural and diverse communities, and commits itself to accompany all in the building of democratic civil societies.

1.1. The circumstances throughout the Middle East present the churches with a new *kairos*moment as in the "*Kairos* Palestine: A Moment of Truth" document of 2009, when Palestinian Christians joined in a common reading of the situation, and challenged the churches to prophetic action.

1.1.1. In May 2013, in Lebanon, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) convened an ecumenical gathering of Christian leaders and representatives from churches and organizations in the region and from 34 other countries, to explore ways to strengthen the Christian presence and witness. They observed that: "*This is a time of crisis with special intensity here in the Middle East, but affects all of humankind. The elements of this crisis include an intensification of religious tribalism, increasing fundamentalism in many of the world's religions, dispersion of the influence of radicalized Islamist groups, widespread violence and insecurity, a deficit in democratic legitimacy and credibility, poverty and lack of opportunity, especially for women and youth, Christian emigration from the region, and a generalized sense of abandonment following decades of unhelpful intervention. Christians, Muslims and Jews all experience the destructive effects of these trends*."

2. Vibrant Christian churches

Christians are rooted in the soil of the Middle East. From the manger of Bethlehem of Judea, the refuge of Egypt, the waters of the Jordan River and Sea of Galilee, and the road to the Cross in Jerusalem itself, Christians are as rooted in the soil of the Middle East as are olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane and cedars in Lebanon. It was on the road to Damascus that Paul was converted (Acts 9) and in Antioch that the disciples first were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

2.1 Despite the ups and downs of harsh and testing historical, as well as present circumstances, Christians have continued and will continue to live together with those with whom this soil is shared. The Christians living in this region are an essential part of their lands, contributing to the rich traditions, plural societies and cultural diversity. In the 19th century, Christians in the region struggled to change their status to one where they would be equal with all other citizens in their societies. Christians today are aware that the guarantee of their free, engaged and meaningful existence in these societies is not by protection, nor a bequest given by political powers, but is acquired by forthright participation as citizens, and by persistent patience in encouraging mentalities and structures that enhance the free participation of all. Today, they do not see themselves as minorities. Rather, they view themselves as equal citizens contributing to the wellbeing of their nations. Their mission and witness in society is evident in multiple spheres of public life such as in culture, politics, education, health services, women and youth development, child protection, social services, relief and development. Numerical proportion historically has not limited the contribution and role of Christians in the Middle East.

2.2. Christians in the region have contributed to the idea that plurality is a gift of God, and that respect for diversity in plural societies is an affirmation that all peoples are created equal in the eyes of God.

2.2.1. In addition to the diversity of religions, diversity also exists within the rich and varied traditions among Christian churches in the Middle East. This has prompted forms of ecumenism that are particular to the region. Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Anglican churches, have together participate in the MECC as an instrument for joint witness and *diakonia*. But ecumenism in the region goes beyond this institutional context to reach the everyday lives of Christians.

2.3. Christian spirituality and witness are revealed by the vibrant monastic communities and parishes, theological faculties, hospitals, schools and humanitarian services. These are essential parts of the creative and continuous witness of the Christians and the churches, offering spiritual resources to all people in the region.

3. Christians in the regional turmoil are called to work for justice and peace

Yet, despite the centuries-long reality of plural communities in the Middle East, some have exploited the current turmoil to advance political radicalism and religious intolerance. Hundreds of thousands of people in the region have been killed, maimed, imprisoned and displaced. The numbers of suffering, internally displaced people, and refugees into neighbouring countries of the Middle East and beyond have created a crushing humanitarian catastrophe.

3.1 In Syria, violence and turmoil have ravaged the lives of millions of people. Abductions of civilians, including clergy, and torture, massacres and extrajudicial killings have become a daily reality. Entire communities, families and individuals, have been forced to flee their homes, to find refuge in other areas of their country, in neighbouring countries and in distant places. Humanitarian relief is unable to meet the desperate needs of dislocated people. The movement of refugees from Syria to neighbouring countries has stressed those in flight and those offering hospitality. The political turmoil within Syria threatens the unity and stability of Syria and its neighbours. This massive movement of population carries serious

implications for those who remain and hope for reconciled communities once peace and stability are restored.

3.2. In Egypt, political turmoil has provided a pretext to instrumentalize and politicise religion, where again, the Christian population and places of worship have been particularly targeted. The level of violence and tensions has increased considerably and reached an alarming level. It is hoped that the young generation which struggled for freedom, human dignity and equal rights to prevail in Egypt, will continue this long struggle and most importantly, will continue this struggle in an inclusive way with all those who hold these values.

3.3.In Iraq, even after the withdrawal of foreign occupying forces, people are still not enjoying human security and dignity. Acts of violence all over the country have reached alarming levels and are affecting the entire population, including the already vulnerableChristian community. Genuine democracy, equal citizenship, the rule of law, reconciliation and impartial development are still out of reach. Under such conditions, Iraq is at great risk of being emptied of its human resources. It is hoped that Iraqis will work together, healing wounds and building a better future for themselves. It is also essential that dialogue between Christians and Muslims continues in order to promote justice and peace in the country.

3.4. Christians in Iran have been living in the country for centuries, contributing to its rich culture and civilization. They constitute an integral part of the society and, along with the rest of Iranians, are suffering from the international sanctions that have a harmful impact on them much more than on the government. Lifting the sanctions will encourage the present government to persevere with the undertaken reforms and to abide by its international obligations under the terms of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

3.5. This tension and violence around the Middle East and in North Africa is taking place in the midst of the on-going and longstanding Palestine/Israel conflict in the region, and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories since 1967. This remains a central issue and a major source of concern for all who are working for peace with justice and for reconciliation. It also remains the core problem that is fuelling the logic underlying many of the conflicts in the region, putting at risk international relations and peace. Resolving once and for all the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians in accordance with United Nations resolutions and international law, addressing all final status issues, including the right of return, can only help in resolving the other conflicts in the region.

3.6. In Jerusalem today Palestinians, Christians and Muslims alike, face discriminatory Israeli policies. “Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity” (*Kairos*Palestine document). Jews, Christians and Muslims alike look to Jerusalem as a place God blessed with the significance of His presence. As a city of two nations revered by the faithful of three religions, it needs to be the place that models for the world the possibilities of living together peacefully in mutual respect.

4. The Gospel imperative for costly ecumenical solidarity

Christians reject on principle governance that diminishes and disenfranchises the people’s right to express opinion or to fully participate in the formulation of public policy. The popular uprisings and subsequent unrest across the region, however chaotic and dangerous,

nonetheless reflect the urgency and capacity of people to claim their right to good governance and protection under the law. These historic events demonstrate the public's repudiation of insecurity in the region, including the manipulation of religious teachings, economic inequalities, failing political alliances, and the imbalances of power that threaten all the people of the region, and humankind. Despite the current turmoil in the region, the long commitment of the Church must remain steadfast to sow seeds of peace and justice and build on the progress that is being made.

4.1. The WCC has consistently expressed its deep concern for all peoples in this region where the history of our faith was born and grew. More particularly, the Christian presence and witness in the land of the Bible has been of vital significance for the ecumenical family, from its inception up until the present day. The central committee, meeting in Geneva in February 2011, grounded theologically the importance of this presence by stating that "*the WCC has viewed the Middle East as a region of special interest, being the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam… Our living faith has its roots in this land, and is nourished and nurtured by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots from the apostolic times. Without this Christian presence, the conviviality among peoples from different faiths, cultures, civilizations, which is a sign of God's love for all humanity, will be endangered. In addition, its extinction will be a sign of failure of the ecumenical family to express the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity*". It also expressed the Council's principles that guide its policy concerning the Middle East region: "*God's justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths*". It finally noted that "*political developments in the region point to signs of hope for democratic changes, respect for human rights and the rule of law in several countries"*. In this context the WCC reaffirms the principle expressed by the central committee in 2011 that "*peace and reconciliation must be conditioned by justice*".The future of the churches and the Christians in these countries is and must be a concern for the entire ecumenical family.

The 10th Assembly of the WCC, meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

A. ***Reaffirms*** that Christians in the Middle East hold in a unique, tangible way the legacy of the apostolic era, preserving in the footsteps of our Lord the living church. Support of these Christian communities, spiritually and materially , preserves the continuity of the Christian presence for the benefit of all Christians and all people from the region and worldwide;

B. ***Regards***current events in various countries in the Middle East as an irreversible process leading to changes in systems of governance, and hopes for a future of justice, peace and stability, cultural diversity and plural communities;

C. ***Prays*** that Christians, especially in the region, maintain their hope even in these extremely critical situations and that these events will be an opportunity for positive change in these societies and for participatory democracy;

D. ***Encourages*** all peoples in the region, including Christians, to initiate actions questioning the abuse of authority and rejecting corruption, as they continue to support one another in the common effort to build democratic civil societies, based on the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights, including religious freedom and freedom of conscience;

E. ***Supports*** Christians in the region in their commitment to engage in constructive dialogue with other religious and ethnic communities so that their countries' manifold heritage is protected and secured;

F. Recommends that the WCC reinforces programmes that enhance regional and international advocacy in partnership with Christians in the Middle East and North Africa;

G. ***Calls*** upon the WCC member churches to express costly solidarity with Christians and churches in the region as well as with all peoples who are struggling for justice and peace, through:

- ***Supporting*** effortsto reinvigorate the MECC, in order to enable it to continue being the voice of Middle East Christians to the world, and the trusted source of basic objective information;
- ***Accompanying*** Christians in the Middle East as they elaborate a common vision for the region;
- ***Facilitating*** responsible pilgrimage to the region.;
- ***Organising*** solidarity visits in consultation with churches in the region, remaining in active fellowship with them;
- ***Disseminating*** educational materials that accurately reflect the geography and history of the Middle East and the realities of sister churches located there;
- ***Developing*** exchange programmes to facilitate the sharing of experiences, information on interfaith relations and dialogue among the churches and religions; and
- ***Supporting*** local churches in empowering women, young people and children to use and develop their capacities and providing opportunities for their meaningful participation in the churches and society;

H. ***Urges*** church-related agencies and all ecumenical partners to strengthen their efforts to address the humanitarian needs in Syria and in all neighbouring countries, focusing humanitarian efforts upon (1) assisting Syrians to remain in their home communities, (2) easing the burden of internally displaced persons and the communities hosting them, (3) easing the burden of host families and communities in neighbouring countries (4) assisting refugees with the goal and intention to facilitate their resettlement into their own communities and homes in Syria, and ***insists*** that all governments allow for full humanitarian access, seeking peaceful ways to exert pressure to stop actions of violence;

I. ***Urges*** the United Nations, and the international community, especially countries that are in positions of political power, to create policies that promote and reach comprehensive peace with justice for all peoples of the region, and to expand every effort to support cessation of violence and military activities;

J. ***Reiterates*** its call tothe United Nations to secure and protect the integrity of the holy sites of all religions in Jerusalem and make them accessible to all as well as to end the occupation of East Jerusalem by Israel;

K. ***Demands*** the immediate release of the two archbishops from Aleppo, His Eminence Boulos (Yazigi) Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Alexandretta and His Eminence MorYouhannaGregorios (Ibrahim) Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo in Syria, kidnapped on 22 April 2013 as they were on a humanitarian mission to

negotiate the release of two kidnapped priests from Aleppo, as well as Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, kidnapped on 29 July 2013, and all captives and those unjustly imprisoned.

Great God,
Hear us as we cry out to you for peace and justice for the peoples and the land itself.
Grant us homelands where water, land and resources are respected and shared by all.
Help us share your love with our neighbours and plant the seeds of tolerance in our communities.
Comfort us so that our souls are healed from the wounds of wars and conflicts.
Give us your light that we may walk out of the shadows of death and impunity.
May your justice truly course through our lands like an unstoppable torrent.
Teach us to trust in hope that one day soon all may dwell beneath their vines and fig trees in peace and happiness.
Opening Prayer, WCC 10th Assembly, 30 October 2013

Egypt

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III expressing distress and concern at the news of the killing of Christians in Nag Hammadi, 14 January 2010**

Your Holiness,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is with great distress and sadness that we received the tragic news of the attack that took place last week in Nag Hammadi targeting innocent Christians celebrating the holy feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is one of my first official communications since assuming responsibility as general secretary of the World Council of Churches on Monday, 11 January. I write to you now to share with Your Holiness the ecumenical family's profound concern. I also take this opportunity to offer our prayers and those of the fellowship of churches for the families of the victims as well as for the Coptic Orthodox Church which, through these tribulations, continues to be a living example of true Christian martyrdom.

Your Holiness, I want to assure you that the World Council of Churches will continue to accompany the members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, especially at this time of hardship.

Although this is not an occasion for us to rejoice, I wish Your Holiness a blessed season of the Nativity of our Lord and His Epiphany in the Jordan River. We pray that our Lord and Saviour will grant Your Holiness and all members of the Coptic Orthodox Church strength and courage to withstand the difficulties.

Yours in His Service,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Message from the WCC executive committee to member churches in Egypt regarding the security of Christians in Egypt, adopted at their meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010**

We, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches (meeting from 23 to 26 February 2010 in Bossey, Switzerland), send you greetings in the precious name of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ!

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches in his letter addressed to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has expressed the WCC's deep concern over the vicious attack by a group of people on a Coptic Orthodox congregation in Nag Hammadi on January 7th, 2010. This crime injured several people in one of the ancient Christian sites in Egypt leaving six Christians and one Muslim dead.

During the meeting of the executive committee, we again heard about this tragic happening, and we take this opportunity as members of the executive committee to convey our deep concern.

We understand that the timing and cowardly nature of the attack were wholly indefensible, since the act was perpetrated at the conclusion of the celebration of a Coptic Christmas midnight mass. This attack against the churches and the killings of innocent people took on added political significance, as this incident occurred during an important religious celebration and its only purpose was to undermine the historical and natural ties between Christians and Muslims in Egypt.

We, the members of the executive committee of the WCC, convey the concern of the entire ecumenical family and affirm our unequivocal support to the churches in Egypt in these troubled times. We draw courage from knowledge that you in the churches of Egypt stand firm in sustaining your witness through the many trials and tribulations that continue to threaten. We count your perseverance in faith as a living example of true Christian witness, even to the point of martyrdom.

It is a matter of regret that in Egypt today Christians can easily fall victim to violence and hatred, and that their security is not fully guaranteed. Many Copts, in particular, are made to feel like aliens in their own country. This marginalization is further compounded by sectarian violence and hatred.

We are conscious of the great pain this has inflicted on the churches in Egypt. While we share with you the agony and anguish of the people, we express to the churches in Egypt our deep concern and solidarity with all your members in these troubled times. We believe that whatever happens to one community has a direct bearing on all communities. Notwithstanding the challenges before us, we know that we cannot despair. Rather, as Christians, we must find ways to be messengers of love and to convey the peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hostility and aggression.

We encourage the churches in Egypt to continue to counter negative trends with a pro-active engagement in dialogue and partnership for life and for Christian-Muslim coexistence.

We reaffirm our support to the various initiatives of the Egyptian churches aimed at advancing the common good of all people in Egypt regardless of their religious identities.

We pray with all members of the churches in Egypt for the strength and courage to withstand and overcome the immense challenges that confront Christians in Egypt in these difficult times.

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Sheikh Dr Muhammad Abd al-Aziz Wasil, the Ulama' of al-Azhar al-Sharif in Egypt, upon the passing away of Sheikh Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi, 11 March 2010**

Your Excellency,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the passing away of Sheikh Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar mosque and head of the al-Azhar University.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and our members around the world, I express our most sincere condolences to you, to the respected Ulama' of al-Azhar al-Sharif, and to the Arab and Muslim world.

Sheikh Tantawi will be remembered with great respect and appreciation for his remarkable contribution to Islamic scholarship, for his prominent role and genuine commitment to intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

May God rest his soul in eternal peace.

Yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Pope Shenouda III expressing condolences at the news of the bomb attack on the Qeddiseen Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria on New Year's eve, 1 January 2011**

Your Holiness,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is with great sadness and shock that I received the news of the bomb attack on the Qeddiseen Coptic Orthodox church in Alexandria on New Year's eve, especially that the attack targeted, once again, innocent worshippers celebrating the midnight mass of the New Year.

With this letter, I want to express to Your Holiness the profound condolences of the ecumenical family and our prayers for the Church in Egypt, and especially for the families of the victims and for the wounded.

It is troubling to hear about continuous threats and attacks on the churches in Egypt and in other parts in the Middle East, and I want to assure Your Holiness that the World Council of Churches will continue to manifest its solidarity with the Coptic Orthodox Church, especially in these difficult times. As one ecumenical family we continue to hold the churches in Egypt in our prayers, and we continue to support the important efforts of the Coptic Orthodox Church in addressing these challenges.

Although this is not an occasion for us to rejoice, I wish Your Holiness a blessed season of the Nativity of our Lord and His Epiphany in the Jordan River. We pray that our Lord and Saviour will grant Your Holiness and all members of the Coptic Orthodox Church strength and courage to withstand the difficulties.

In Christ our Lord,
Rev. Dr Olav Tveit
General secretary

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the attack on worshippers in the Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt during a New Year's midnight mass, 1 January 2011**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) condemns the vicious attack on innocent worshippers in the Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt when a bomb was detonated at the conclusion of the celebration of a New Year's midnight mass. As a result, at least 21 people have been killed and more than 80 injured.

The WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, on behalf of the fellowship of WCC member churches and the entire ecumenical family, expresses profound sorrow as well as condolences and prayers for the families of the victims, for the wounded and for all the people of Egypt. He encourages Egyptians to stand firm and united through the many trials and tribulations that continue to threaten.

The events of 1 January 2011 are a reminder of other tragedies in the region, including an attack on Coptic worshippers in Nag Hammadi, Egypt on 7 January 2010 and the lethal assault on the Church of Our Lady of Salvation (Sayidat al-Nejat) in Baghdad, Iraq on 31 October 2010. Tveit recalled that the Baghdad attack took place at the time of a significant Muslim-Christian dialogue in Geneva and that the Muslim and Christian leaders who were present issued a joint denunciation of the act.

The World Council of Churches appeals to President Mubarak of Egypt, to religious leaders and to governments across the region to act swiftly and boldly to safeguard the fundamental religious rights of worshippers of all faiths, to ensure security in the face of violence and to guarantee justice for all people.

Places of worship representing many different faith traditions have been targets of violence by extremists. Tveit said, "Government action must be matched by solidarity among Muslims, Christians and people of all faiths as they interact at the local level and together denounce any violent attack. We expect leaders to join once again in condemning such acts."

Tveit referred to a message from the WCC executive committee to the churches in Egypt in 2010. At that time, he said, "the WCC expressed once again its deep concern and solidarity while affirming its unequivocal support to the churches of Egypt in these troubled times during which Coptic Christians continue to provide living examples of true Christian witness, to the point of martyrdom."

In these difficult and challenging times, Tveit added, the WCC calls particularly on religious and national leaders to support the people in Egypt as they affirm life and engage in countering negative trends through peaceful means, such as proactive engagement in dialogue and partnership between Christians and Muslims in Egypt and throughout the world.

- **Report from the visit of a delegation to express the sympathy and support of WCC member churches to Pope Shenouda III in the aftermath of the lethal bomb attack on New Year's eve on a church in Alexandria, 8 January 2011**

WCC general secretary Tveit expressed the sympathy and support of the WCC member churches to Pope Shenouda and spoke of the cross as a symbol of solidarity. Visitors from the Geneva offices of the World Council of Churches (WCC) were honoured to be received in Cairo, Egypt on Saturday 8 January 2011 by Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC, led the group to Cairo in order to offer personal condolences in the aftermath of the lethal bomb attack at the New Year on a church in Alexandria.

Tveit expressed the sympathy and support of the WCC member churches to Pope Shenouda at this difficult time for Egypt. He gave his assurance that the fellowship of churches was united in prayer for the Coptic Orthodox Church and for all the people of Egypt.

The WCC general secretary spoke of the cross as a symbol of solidarity shared by Christians around the world. "The cross serves as a reminder of the suffering borne in human life, and of Christ's death on the cross, yet as a Christian emblem it also points toward resurrection, reconciliation and peace," Tveit said.

In his message for Christmas, which the Coptic Orthodox celebrated on 7 January, Pope Shenouda focused on the love and peace of God towards everyone. "It is encouraging to see how his message inspired both Christians and Muslims to stand together against violence and attempts at dividing the people" Tveit said. "Pope Shenouda demonstrates that when spiritual leadership is done well, it can have tremendous influence in making peace."

Pope Shenouda stressed the importance of prayer to God, and the need for solidarity among all people.

Tveit was accompanied from Geneva to Cairo by WCC director of programmes Rev. Dr Hielke Wolters and programme executive for Christian-Muslim dialogue Rima Barsoum.

- **Open statement from WCC general secretary regarding recent events throughout Egypt calling for a peaceful and timely resolution to the conflict, 31 January 2011**

The World Council of Churches is following the situation in Egypt with great concern. Member churches in all parts of the world are praying for the people of Egypt. There are disturbing reports of increasing numbers of people being killed, of assaults and threats and of many living in fear. Our hopes and prayers are for the safety of citizens, for wisdom and compassion on the part of the authorities and for a non-violent and just resolution of conflicts and grievances.

We call for peaceful dialogue and joint efforts at every level of society to find the way forward to a future that brings hope and security for the good of all people and communities.

We pray to God for mercy and protection for the Egyptian people and for all religious communities, and we are standing together with the churches in these challenging times.

- **Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to the churches in Egypt, expressing concerns about the recent incidents against the churches in Egypt and the increasing sectarian tensions witnessed by the country, 17 May 2011**

Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

I greet you with this joyful acclamation, during this blessed season of Easter, in which we renew our faith in God's love for His creation, and hope for a just world transformed through God's Holy Spirit.

We are very much troubled by the recent incidents against the churches in Egypt and by the increasing sectarian tensions witnessed by the country.

Christians and Muslims have lived together in Egypt for centuries; they have struggled together in times of difficulties and shared together victories and celebrations. They have both contributed to the development and progress of the Egyptian communities and have stood together against corruption and injustice.

In these challenging times of uncertainty in the country we call upon the security forces to put more efforts in providing safety to all the citizens. We also call upon the Egyptians to join hands and hearts in facing these times together and moving forward towards a better future and greater conviviality.

The signs from the authorities promoting freedom of religion and worship and combating discrimination on the basis of just and inclusive communities are very encouraging.

We trust that by your wisdom and prayers, and in dialogue with the Muslim counterparts, you will be able to lead the people of Egypt out of the troubled times towards a common life of prosperity.

We pray for the victims and their families that God embrace them in his heavenly peace.

I remain yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **WCC's continued support for Egyptian Christians in their quest for justice, rejection of violence and initiatives for dialogue in the wake of 9 October clashes between peaceful protestors and the army in Cairo, 18 October 2011**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) supports Egyptian Christians in their quest for justice, rejection of violence and initiatives for dialogue in the wake of 9 October clashes between peaceful protestors and the army in Cairo which resulted in 25 people dead, mostly Coptic Christians, while the country was preparing to return to democracy.

Egypt's Christians make up about 10 percent of the population and mainly consist of Coptic Orthodox as well as Presbyterian, Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Catholic churches.

Christians in Egypt have remained vulnerable to the threat of religious extremism for some time, and their concerns have emerged crucially during the recent changing political landscape of Egypt.

They are now asserting themselves in condemning violence as witnessed on 9 October, and in the burning of churches like the Church of Al-Marinab and Edfu-Aswan this year.

A recent statement issued by the Protestant Church in Egypt says, "Churches reject acts of violence in Egypt during this time of sociopolitical transitions. We therefore appeal to all those within the nation to stand together side-by-side in order to confront these incidents. We call on all Egyptians to reject the use of violence and, in doing so, work together to create a unified legislation to allow for building places of worship for all."

"Thus," the statement continued, "as Egyptians – both Muslim and Christians alike – we must call for the immediate investigation of the events of 9 October, with emphasis on bringing accountability to the doors of those responsible for the violence which, tragically, left many dead."

Similarly the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Service joined hands with civil society actors including writers, academics, religious leaders, youth and media professionals to condemn the violence. A joint statement at the end of a symposium on "Together against sectarian tension" stated:

"We appeal to all Egyptians to call for an end to violence. We must act now, collectively, to save the future of our great nation from the alternative – a divided and violent future which reminds us little of the Egypt we know and love."

The WCC praises the efforts of the churches in raising their voices for peace and dialogue. Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC, says, “We as churches condemn the violence perpetrated against the Coptic Christians during the unfortunate incidents of 9 October. We hold the victims in our prayers. It is through the resilience of Egyptians, both Christians and Muslims, that the sectarian strife can be defeated. We stand in solidarity with the Egyptian churches in these difficult times.”

The WCC through its programme Public witness: addressing power, affirming peace has been engaged with the churches in Middle East in collective efforts by ecumenical partners to achieve peace and justice at local, national, regional and international levels.

- **WCC Expression of concern over human trafficking in the Sinai Desert, 18 November 2011**

During the past year thousands of people from North Africa have disappeared in the Sinai Desert region while crossing the border between Egypt and Israel.

“Falling prey to human traffickers, employment scams, harassment, organ thefts and forced deportations, these people face one of the worst human rights violations,” says Fr Mussie Zerai.

Zerai is a Roman Catholic priest from Eritrea, based in Vatican, and spoke recently in a meeting at the World Council of Churches (WCC) offices in Geneva organized by WCC’s Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

He is the founder of Agenzia Habeshia, a charity for asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.

“Churches have been the voice of the voiceless. The ecumenical family has a great responsibility to be engaged in global advocacy on behalf of these people, as their rights are being violated,” said Zerai.

The Sinai Desert is a traditional transit route for people from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and sub-Saharan Africa, escaping political turmoil, hunger and poverty and hoping to end up in Europe.

“More than 30,000 people have fled to Israel, mostly from countries like Tunisia, Libya, Ethiopia, Sudan and others, since 2009. Out of which, around 10,000 died during the travel, and 3,000 have fallen prey to the brutal organ thefts. The documentation we have gathered at Habeshia contains some astounding figures,” says Zerai.

It is out of sheer desperation, in order to escape conflict, political turmoil and deteriorating human rights situations in Eritrea that people take such risky journeys.

Zerai encouraged the WCC member churches, especially in Egypt, to challenge their governments regarding the inhuman treatment of refugees, which he says was pointed out several times by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Human Rights Watch and other international human rights organizations.

"Asylum-seekers are kept in jails by the Egyptian government, facing inhuman treatment and forced to be deported, which means a severe threat to their lives," said Zerai.

The 118 Eritreans facing forced deportation
Zerai also shared information about the recent incident of 118 Eritreans, who are faced with "forced deportation" at the detention centre in Aswan, Egypt.

"These asylum-seekers are under severe threat of persecution if they return to Eritrea. This is the result of a human rights crisis in Eritrea due to which around 1,000 people are attempting to flee every month," shared Zerai.

"The inhuman treatment of these people amounts to beatings and forced deportation by the Egyptian government, which violates the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to which Egypt is a party," he added.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC, stated that "human trafficking is a serious threat to human security. Trafficking has become a criminal industry and this is proved in the case of the Sinai desert, while many people have been killed during and after organ thefts."

"The WCC is committed to be engaged in advocacy on human trafficking as this is a vital human rights issue. This issue will be discussed in our forthcoming meeting on 'Peace and Security in Africa' in Kigali, Rwanda," said Dr Nigussu Legesse, the WCC programme executive for Africa.

Pointing out the long history of the ecumenical movement in promoting human rights, Zarai stressed the need for more collaborative actions among churches and other civil society organizations, in order to protect the victims of these human rights violations.

- ## Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to Dr Mohamed Morsi, the newly elected president of Egypt, 26 June 2012

Your Excellency,

Greetings in the Name of the One God,

As the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a fellowship of 349 churches worldwide, with founding member churches in Egypt (the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, and the Evangelical Church of Egypt/Synod of the Nile, and the Anglican/Episcopal Diocese of Egypt), I wish to extend to your Excellency our heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of your election to the presidency of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

At the WCC, we, along with our member churches and the many Muslim partners we have in Egypt, have been closely following the latest developments in the country. We have great admiration for the courage of the younger generation which peacefully led a popular movement seeking democracy and freedom, social justice and equality in citizenship. We believe that respect for the principle of public and individual freedoms in Egypt, including political freedom, as well as freedom of thought, opinion and expression, will be an example

to be followed by all other Arab countries. We trust that you will guide the process through which these freedoms will be stated in laws guaranteeing their protection.

Acknowledging all the sacrifices made by thousands of people in Egypt, including you personally, in suffering persecution and political imprisonment to achieve this new future, we are confident that such a climate of fear will no longer be reproduced in the new Egypt under your leadership. You have indeed clearly declared, at several occasions, that you will be the president for all Egyptians, and everyone will be equal under the rule of law, which will protect the rich heritage of political, cultural and religious diversities in the country.

Together with our member churches in Egypt, and the large fellowship of churches around the world, we reiterate our wishes and prayers to the One God, that He may grant Your Excellency a successful mandate, and keep Egypt a safe and prosperous country.

With my prayers for your peace, and for the peace of Egypt,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary, WCC

- **Message of solidarity and support from WCC general secretary to member churches in Egypt on the country's political crisis, 10 July 2013**

As general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I express my deep concern over the news coming from Egypt reporting dangerous escalation of violence in several parts of the country, which have resulted in more than fifty persons killed and hundreds more wounded. The WCC has always condemned the use of violence as a means of resolving conflicts.

We want to assure the Egyptian people of our support for their ongoing efforts to maintain their unity within the diversity of their political affiliations. Together with our member churches in Egypt, and in the wider ecumenical family, we are praying for a peaceful and inclusive transitional process, in which all parties will work together to form a government that will lead the country to stability, justice and peace.

We strongly support the efforts of the churches in Egypt, working together with their Muslim partners and all other political parties and civil society organizations and actors, to facilitate peace-building through a reconciliation and healing process on a national level. We encourage all political parties to engage in this process so that national unity is preserved.

We are confident that the Egyptian people who rose up claiming dignity, freedom and equality will find peaceful ways to reach these common goals, while respecting political and religious diversity. We are also confident that political and religious leaders in Egypt are aware that in critical historical moments of change and transformation in political systems, inclusive processes are vital for the unity of the nation, while exclusive ones lead to frustration and disappointments.

Yours in our Common Lord,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Egypt calling for prayers for peace and expressing concern over the burning of churches and violence following protests on 14 August, 15 August 2013**

The World Council of Churches and its member churches are greatly concerned by the violent turn of events in Egypt and call for an immediate end of violence from all sides. The World Council of Churches calls for prayer for all Egyptians for healing, justice and peace. The only way forward is for mutual recognition as equal citizens within Egypt, sharing responsibilities and authority, accepting the diversity of political opinions and religious beliefs.

We deeply regret the attacks against several churches and properties of the Christian community in different areas of the country that have occurred in the last days.

Since 25 January 2011 Egypt has been experiencing a critical moment in its history. The Egyptian people showed on different occasions their belief in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society where all parties join hands in facing the current challenges and building a better future based on social justice and human dignity. We believe that the commitment of all Egyptians to justice and peace will help them to overcome all obstacles and reach common expectations.

We are thankful to see that the churches of Egypt, even in this situation, are witnesses of God's peace on earth. Throughout history they have offered up many sacrifices and martyrs for their beloved country.

Let us pray for all the Egyptians; may God grant them comfort, heal their wounds and accompany them on their way to justice and peace.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Iran

- **Comment by WCC general secretary on Iran nuclear agreement, 27 November 2013**

We welcome the interim nuclear agreement between Iran and six world powers reached here in Geneva on 24 November. We pray that this agreement becomes a sign of hope in a region where many yearn for peace. This common ground offers the region and the world a glimpse of a more promising future.

We are grateful for the diplomats who participated in patient dialogue to create an opening in a wall that has isolated Iran for more than 30 years.

We urge all parties to use the agreed upon six-month span of confidence-building to reach toward a longer-term horizon for improved relations and mutual obligations which all the countries involved need.

This agreement reminds us of how important the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is for peace in the world, and particularly in the Middle East. May God help all of us to continue our efforts towards a future without nuclear weapons.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Iraq

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the heads of churches in Iraq welcoming the news that a Council of Christian Church Leaders of Iraq had been established, 18 February 2010**

Your Beatitudes, your Eminences and Excellencies,
Ministers in the service of Christ,

Greetings to you in the precious name of Jesus Christ!

We are deeply encouraged and gratified with news from Iraq about the creation of the Council of Christian Church Leaders in Iraq. This is information we receive with great hope and deep satisfaction. In our view, it is a development that augurs as much for the future of the churches in Iraq as it does for Iraq as a nation. The visible unity we seek in response to the prayer of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (John 17:21) is both a gift and calling. Discovering the presence of the crucified and risen Christ among us, we are coming closer to each other. Overcoming what separates us, we are comforting and strengthening not only each other, but also engaging together for the betterment of our neighbours and societies.

The WCC has repeatedly affirmed that Christians in Iraq are an essential part of Iraqi society and have been an active component of the nation from its very birth. Iraqi Christians have never viewed themselves as simply a minority community who stand for their own interests. They have always shown their deep rootedness in the history and civilization of Iraq.

It is for this reason that we celebrate the formation of the Council of Christian Church Leaders and congratulate the leaders of the Council for formulating a vision that is unequivocally committed to the advancement of all Iraqi citizens. From this standpoint, the Council's plan to engage in promoting ecumenical initiatives and dialogue and partnership with Muslims is an essential assertion.

In your statement of intent, you have clearly set out the link between advancing and supporting the Christian presence while, at the same time, promoting Christian participation in public life based on the rights of citizenship and "building the nation as a tent and a house for all".

The WCC wishes to assure you that we join hands with you in this defining moment of the church in Iraq. Our prayer is that the Council may grow in strength and reach to all peoples in the true spirit of its founding aims and purposes. We commit ourselves as a fellowship of

churches from around the world to accompany you in the arduous tasks that face the Iraqi churches in the rebuilding of your nation.

Speaking personally as one newly appointed general secretary to another, I particularly wish to congratulate His Eminence Avak Asadourian on the honour and responsibility that are now his, and I assure you all of my continuing support in prayer.

May God's blessings go with the Council in this pilgrimage.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Follow-up action on the February 2010 WCC executive committee decision regarding the current situation of Christians in Iraq, 31 March 2010**

Letters with the text below were sent from the WCC general secretary to Prof. Viorel Ionita, acting general secretary of the Conference of European Churches; Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the NCCCUSA and to all WCC member churches in countries from where troops are or have been engaged in Iraq – Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

I am writing to express our concern and solidarity with the churches and all members of the Christian community in Iraq. We have been following the situation in Iraq and are concerned about the attacks against Christians in the Mosul area, northern Iraq, in which more than 13 Christians have been killed since early this year. We are aware that thousands of Christians were forced, yet again, to flee their homes and leave their properties. In fact, the displacement of so many Christians also affected their participation in the recently held election in Iraq. The election is now over and a long process of coalition-building is expected to follow the final results. The tension which exists between various political forces is creating a climate of mistrust and animosity of which Christians are becoming innocent victims.

In fact, these tragic massacres of Christians prior to the election were not isolated incidents. Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, hundreds of Christians have been killed in different parts of the country including bishops and priests, along with the destruction of church buildings and properties. It is painful to hear that thousands of Christians have been internally displaced and hundreds have left the country as they cannot survive in their own ancestral land. We are also aware of the fact that the remaining Christians in Iraq live in constant fear, feeling unprotected and insecure, a feeling further aggravated by the severe economic conditions. The very existence of this ancient community is at great risk.

As you know, long before the war waged against Iraq, the WCC member churches unanimously denounced it as "immoral, illegal and ill-advised". As part of our prophetic witness, we raised our voice against the war, which clearly warned the international community that the consequences of such a war would be catastrophic for the world order and would affect relations between peoples of different faiths. We also warned that a war against Iraq would dramatically affect the fragile Christian communities and other religious and

ethnic minorities in Iraq. Our voice did not prevent the war, but it was heartening that the churches joined together to respond to God's call to be prophetic witnesses.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches held from 24 to 26 February 2010 at Bossey, Geneva, Switzerland discussed the plight of the Christians. The WCC executive committee suggested that the general secretary request member churches and ecumenical councils in countries from where troops are engaged in Iraq, to urge their respective governments to prevent the targeted attacks on minority communities, especially the Christians in Mosul and other parts of Iraq. The executive committee also suggested engaging in an ecumenical advocacy that seeks:

a. to end violence, ethnic and religious cleansing against minority groups, particularly Christians in Mosul and other parts of Iraq,
b. to take adequate measures to prevent the exodus of Christians from Mosul,
c. to extend necessary humanitarian aid assistance to the displaced families,
d. to work for a sustainable solution which will preserve religious and ethnic diversities in Iraq,
e. to invite WCC member churches to observe a special day of prayer for Iraq and its Christian communities.

It is in this context that I invite you to take a stand vis-à-vis your government, which has sent troops to Iraq, and urge the decision-makers in your country to do the needful to prevent the targeted attacks on minority communities, especially the Christians in Mosul and other parts of Iraq where they are living in vulnerable situations. It is important that firm steps be taken at this crucial time to protect the life and dignity of persecuted Christians in Iraq and to support and accompany them in their struggle for life in dignity.

Therefore, I am pleading with you and your church to engage in pro-active advocacy initiatives. We have also sent this letter to the WCC member churches in the European countries with troops in Iraq.

May God Almighty guide us and bestow on us the strength of His Holy Spirit so that we speak in the spirit of truth, peace with justice on behalf of the oppressed and the powerless.

Yours in Christ's love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary calling for an end to violence against Christians in Mosul and urging the Iraqi administration to bring stability and security to the country, 12 May 2010**

Recent violence in Iraq has led Iraqi church leaders to issue a statement calling on "all government officials and political parties in order to give priority to the public interest and the security of citizens."

The statement, released Thursday 6 May by the Council of the Christian Church Leaders of Iraq (CCCLI), came after an emergency meeting of the council in Qaraqosh. At the time, the church leaders were responding to a 2 May attack in the northern city of Mosul, where buses carrying Christian university students travelling from the center of the district of Hamdaniya to the University of Mosul were bombed. One person was killed and some 188 men and women were injured, some seriously.

Since then more attacks have taken place throughout Iraq according to news reports, although not all were against Christians. Attacks during the past few days have killed more than 100 people and injured hundreds of others.

The wave of violence comes after contentious national elections and at a time when the country is struggling to form a new government.

“As we express our solidarity with the people of Iraq, and convey our condolences to the families of the victims, we are very concerned about the new escalation of violence against Christians in Mosul,” Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches said Wednesday.

“We urge all parties and members of the Iraqi administration to take up their responsibility in bringing security and stability to the country and insuring the safety of Iraqi citizens,” he said.

The church leaders of Iraq closed their statement saying, “We pray to God to give comfort to the martyrs and a quick recovery to the wounded and to protect our country from all harm, and to restore to us the gift of peace and stability.”

The church council was formed in February of this year and includes all patriarchs, archbishops, bishops and heads of churches in Iraq from the 14 Christian communities registered in Iraq since 1982. Their churches belong to the Catholic, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox as well as Protestant traditions.

The aim of the new council is to unite the opinion, position and decision of the churches in Iraq on issues related to the churches and the state.

The council intends to do so by upholding and strengthening the Christian presence, promoting cooperation and joint action without interfering in private matters of the churches or their related entities.

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the 31 October 2010 attack on the Sayidat al-Nejat Church in Baghdad, 1 November 2010**

The World Council of Churches general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, has condemned the “criminal act of terror” Sunday in Baghdad, Iraq, when gunmen took hostages in the Sayidat al-Nejat Church. The death toll from the hostage standoff rose to some 58 people on Monday, including priests, women and children and Iraqi security forces who conducted a raid to end the siege.

"The World Council of Churches strongly condemns the criminal act of terror that took place on Sunday in the Sayyidat al-Najat Church in Baghdad and expresses its deep sympathy and solidarity with those who lost their loved ones and pray for a speedy recovery for the injured.

The fellowship of the World Council of Churches is deeply troubled by the continuous suffering of Christians in Iraq and continues to stand in solidarity with all churches as they pass through turbulent and challenging times and witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hatred and aggression.

This is not the first time that such attacks have targeted Christian communities in Iraq. All those responsible need to be brought to justice, and governmental authorities should take their responsibility to bring safety and security to all citizens and particularly to those in vulnerable situation."

Tveit made these comments shortly before delivering the opening address at a high-level Christian-Muslim consultation, which takes place at the WCC headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland from 1-4 November.

Israel-Palestine

- **Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's thirteenth session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 22 March 2010**

Mr President,

I am speaking on behalf of the Commission of Churches of International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA/WCC). My purpose in addressing you today is to focus on the settlements in the OPT and the issues that emanate from them. The problem is not just a political one; it is a policy that is leading to the destruction of the humanity of human beings. This is why it is a concern to the churches.

In September 2009, the central committee of the WCC noted the ongoing settlement policy of the state of Israel as an obstacle to a viable Palestinian State. Because of the settlements access is being denied to Palestinians to carry on any semblance of normal life. Palestinians who are dispossessed by illegal settlement activity are denied access to options of viable economic activity, to basic resources such as water, land, housing, and health care. Because they are directly linked to the wall and military checkpoints, settlements also extract other serious consequences such as limiting the freedom of movement.

Settlements are a violation of international law and the cause of the violation of many human rights of the Palestinians. With over 400,000 Israelis established in some 150-plus settlements, Palestinians have to contend with changing demographics as well as the unending amalgamation of new territories by Israel in the West Bank.

The situation is particularly worrying in Jerusalem. In Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, Ras al-'Amud, Mount of Olives and other Palestinian neighbourhoods surrounding the Old City, settler organizations are redrawing the demography and geography of the city, making it

increasingly unlikely that it could become a shared capital between two states and the three monotheistic faiths. Two weeks ago, the announcement by the government of Israel to build 1,600 new housing units in East Jerusalem shows the acceleration of this process. Close to 200,000 settlers now live in Jerusalem and nearly 100,000 in surrounding areas. Moreover, the expansion of metropolitan Jerusalem to the east threatens to cut the West Bank in half, undermining the possibility of establishing a contiguous and therefore a viable Palestinian state.

Outside of Jerusalem, the construction of settlement is also continuing at a worrying pace, despite the 10 months partial freeze announced on 25 November (excluding East Jerusalem and building projects already under way) by the Netanyahu government. We would like to draw a particular attention to the situation of former military base, known as "Osh Grab", that has been abandoned by the Israeli army in 2006 in Beit Sahour and was renovated by the municipality and transformed into a recreational park and playground – the "Peace Park" – which is now occupied again by the Israeli army since February 10th.

The International community has demanded a total freeze in settlement construction in the West Bank including East Jerusalem in order to resume the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

In 1979 the Security Council Resolution 446 stated that the Israeli settlements in the OPT has "no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle-East". The International Court of Justice ruling on the wall declared as illegal the extension of the wall beyond the Green Line in order to include some of these settlements as well as all its infrastructure, including a network of tunnels, by-pass roads, "security zones",.

Furthermore, the UN Security Council in resolution 476 (30 June 1980) stipulates that "all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and also constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East." A series of subsequent UN Security Council resolutions reaffirm the intent and scope of what we have referred to just above.

We ask the Human Rights Council to intervene and insist that the Israeli government meets its international obligations as a member of the international community of nations and under provisions of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We appeal to all member nations of the Human Rights Council to exercise their power and authority to bring to bear moral and political pressure using whatever means they have at their disposal to caution Israel of appropriate consequences in case it does not comply.

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary regarding the Israeli military order redefining the notion of "infiltrator" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 21 April 2010**

Expressing dismay at a recent Israeli military order redefining the notion of “infiltrator” in the occupied Palestinian territories, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, said he is “worried the new measures will be a severe obstacle toward the process for a Just Peace.”

Since 1969 the Israeli military defined an “infiltrator” as a person who unlawfully entered the occupied area. But in a recent amendment, the definition of “infiltrator” is “a person who entered the area unlawfully following the effective date, or a person who is present in the area and does not lawfully hold a permit”.

“This amendment will affect tens of thousands of Palestinians and potentially confine them to their villages and towns creating an atmosphere of fear in the occupied territories,” observed Tveit. “This worsens the situation. Nobody, including the Palestinians, should be denied their basic human rights, that is, to be able to move and have a normal life.”

It is a question of principle, Tveit said. “The Israeli government should immediately rescind this order because it is in contravention of the fourth Geneva Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As a signatory to these international instruments Israel has a legal and moral responsibility to work within their frameworks.”

He warned that “if the definition of ‘infiltrator’ is applied to Palestinians born in Gaza and living in the West Bank, the military will be removing people who are ‘protected residents’ from one part of the occupied territory to the other, in a clear contravention of the Article 49 of the Geneva Convention”.

In a letter dated 11 April 2010, addressed to the Israeli defence minister, nine Israeli human rights organizations protested against this amended order arguing that it is ambiguous about what Israel considers a valid permit and say that it gives the military provisions to prosecute and/or deport thousands of Palestinians who could now be defined as “infiltrators”.

In an alert released yesterday, the Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) called the order “a flagrant display of military arrogance” and one which will sever the Palestinians from vital economic, health, education, and social centres.

Tveit also expressed solidarity with the Christian group Kairos Palestine which emphasized that the order will “wrongly criminalize thousands of people”. Kairos Palestine has called upon “churches worldwide to publically demand the revocation of the order” issued by the Israeli military authorities and “work to restore the justice that is both our calling and our right”.

Addressing the assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia last week on the theme “Called to prophesy, reconcile and heal: an ecumenical perspective” Tveit said the December 2009 Kairos Document crafted by Palestinian Christians calls the church to stand against injustice, violence and occupation. Tveit underlined how “our prophetic witness needs to be expressed through our love for the Palestinians as well as for the Israelis, as all parties need healing and reconciliation”. Tveit urged all churches to be aware of how severe actions in the region can disrupt the peace process.

- **Joint statement on a "theology of pilgrimage for Palestine" calling on Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land to show concern for the Palestinian people and the reality they face due to Israeli occupation, 21 May 2010**

Meeting in Geneva from May 18-21, 2010 we are 27 representatives of 23 organizations and institutions from 14 countries, including theologians representing seven Christian denominations, tourism activists and advocates, Palestinian Christian activists and tour operators. Inspired by the Palestine *Kairos* Document, we have come together to promote the concept of pilgrimage for transformation as a tool all Christians can use to work for the community of God as advocates for a Just Peace that will allow both Palestinians and Israelis to live together in peace and dignity.

The context
Palestinians have experienced 62 years of dispossession and exile and 43 years of occupation. This occupation has deprived them of human rights, reversed the progress of their economic development, and limited their access to education, health, free worship, and employment and isolated the Palestinians from each other. Settlement activity violates the Geneva Convention prohibition against an occupying power transferring its civilian population to the area it occupies. Continuing to tolerate this egregious situation of illegality and injustice threatens our collective humanity and security and undermines the potential of international law to peacefully regulate international affairs. We call on all people of faith to work for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine in accordance with UN resolutions.

We express grave concern about the diminishing Palestinian Christian population whose continuous presence over the last 2000 years has maintained the traditions and community of our earliest Christian forbearers. We stress that the Israeli military's prohibiting of Palestinians from entering Jerusalem to worship in their holy sites is unacceptable.

When pilgrims come to Palestine and do not engage with the Palestinians in their despair they are in fact reinforcing and supporting the occupation. These pilgrims actually take hope away from the whole region.

The Kairos document declared that occupation is a sin and this meeting emphasized the fact that many Christian interpretations are oppressive rather than liberating, and deny rather than support life. These contradict the basic Christian values of compassion, empathy, and the love of God for every person as well as forgoing the compelling Christian responsibility to work for justice and peace.

The monopoly held by Israeli travel sector and its state policies continues to cripple and hamper the growth of the Palestinian travel sector and its capacity to generate needed revenue for economic and social development.

We therefore call on:

• ***Churches*** to renounce and reject harmful biblical interpretations and theologies which legitimize the occupation of Palestine and instead recognize God's preferential option for the poor and take up the *Kairos* call to "come and see".

• ***Pilgrims*** to fulfil their pilgrimage by abiding with the Code of Conduct agreed by the Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism and searching for a new and deeper truth, participating in a purposeful and respectful journey with Palestinians through their land and their history, taking sufficient time to listen, reflect and pray with them, discerning God's presence in the Palestinian people's struggle for justice.

• ***Tourists*** to responsibly engage with the Palestinian people on their lands, spending at least half of their time with them, seeking a genuine encounter and learning about their lives and hopes and dreams.

Finally, we affirm the growing consciousness among many churches and pilgrims who are seeking an authentic encounter with the Palestinian people and further call on them to strongly carry their message forward to their constituencies.

Issued by:
Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), Palestine
Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum (WCC-PIEF)
Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT)
Kairos Palestine.

- **Press release on World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 29 May to 4 June 2010, 31 May 2010**

Initiators of a World Week for Peace have urged Christians to pray and act for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel. The call is "timely", they said, as peace activists have reportedly been killed after Israeli commandos stormed a convoy of ships carrying aid to the Gaza Strip this morning.

"We are uniting our voices with others, to speak with one voice against the injustices being suffered by the Palestinian people living under occupation for now more than 43 years," said Rev. John Calhoun preaching at the ecumenical centre in Geneva to mark the World Week for Peace in Palestine-Israel (WWPPI) on 31 May.

The week has been convened by the World Council of Churches in cooperation with ecumenical partners and encourages Christians and churches across the world to pray and work for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel. A list of events taking place during the week shows how churches from the Philippines to the United States and from the Netherlands to Kenya are engaged in related activities.

"The call to be peace-makers is a holy call," said the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in welcoming participants to the service. "This year the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel (WWPPI) is once more timely … with people seeking to show the need for humanitarian aid going to Gaza being killed this morning … This year again we need even more than before to point to how settlements and occupation are real obstacles to a Just Peace. All parties must stop violence and find the way forward."

According to news reports, at least 10 people have been killed this morning during an operation carried out by the Israeli military in order to prevent a flotilla of up to nine vessels

carrying hundreds of peace activists to reach Gaza with humanitarian supplies, such as food and medicines. The flotilla, organized separately to the WCC peace week, involves members of Christian and Muslim groups as well as politicians and activists, including some Israelis.

"This conflict has caused too much suffering, too much injustice. It is time for this conflict to end," stated Calhoun in his sermon. Calhoun, a United Methodist Church pastor from the United States currently works in Amman, Jordan and coordinates the WCC's World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel.

Pointing to the very strong message of the *Kairos* document, written by Christians in the Middle East and launched last December, Tveit reiterated its call to churches and Christians throughout the world to respond to the conflict "with prayer, witness and hard work … it is remarkable that in this situation people are prepared to talk about love. We are not against anybody; we are for peace for all peoples."

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the assault by Israeli naval forces on a Gaza-bound vessel, 1 June 2010**

It is with great distress that the World Council of Churches received the news that the Israeli naval forces stormed a Gaza-bound vessel carrying humanitarian aid in international waters before dawn on Monday, killing at least 10 civilians and injuring many more. We condemn the assault and killing of innocent people who were attempting to deliver humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, who have been under a crippling Israeli blockade since 2007. We further condemn the flagrant violation of international law by Israel in attacking and boarding a humanitarian convoy in international waters. We pray for all those who are affected by the attack, especially the bereaved families.

We urge the government of Israel to repatriate those detained by the Israeli army. We call for an immediate release of the impounded ships, and an end to the economic blockade of Gaza. It is our considered opinion that the legitimate humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza be met in accordance with international humanitarian law. We further call the UN Security Council to mandate a full investigation into the assault.

The deplorable events which occurred yesterday off the coast of Gaza remind us yet again of the pressing need for an end to the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories. The World Council of Churches reiterates its commitment to work for just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Oral intervention made by WCC staff (EAPPI) at the UNHRC's fourteenth session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, condemning the Israeli naval forces storming of a Gaza-bound vessel carrying humanitarian aid in international waters, 2 June 2010**

Mr President,

I am speaking on behalf of the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Dr Olav Tveit.

It is with great distress that the World Council of Churches received the news that the Israeli naval forces stormed a Gaza-bound vessel carrying humanitarian aid in international waters before dawn on Monday, killing at least 10 civilians and injuring many more. We condemn the assault and killing of innocent people who were attempting to deliver humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, who have been under a crippling Israeli blockade since 2007. We further condemn the flagrant violation of international law by Israel in attacking and boarding a humanitarian convoy in international waters. We pray for all those who are affected by the attack, especially the bereaved families.

We urge the government of Israel to repatriate those detained by the Israeli army. We call for an immediate release of the impounded ships, and an end to the economic blockade of Gaza. It is our considered opinion that the legitimate humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza be met in accordance with international humanitarian law. We further call the UN Security Council to mandate a full investigation into the assault.

The deplorable events which occurred yesterday off the coast of Gaza remind us yet again of the pressing need for an end to the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories. The World Council of Churches reiterates its commitment to work for just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel.

- **Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UNHRC's fourteenth session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 14 June 2010**

Mr President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches expresses its dismay at the amended Israeli order on infiltrators that came into force on 13 April 2010. According to Order 1650, everyone in the West Bank is an infiltrator unless he or she is in possession of a permit issued by Israel.

As the wording of the order is very vague it is not clear who it affects. We are concerned that the order will be used primarily against Palestinians who have been established in the West Bank for many years but whose official address remains in the Gaza Strip because Israel refuses to change it in the population registry. There were many such cases even before the new order came into force (for example, the case of Betany Azzam at the University of Bethlehem). We also fear that Israel will divide families by deporting the spouses of West Bank residents when the spouse holds a foreign passport or an East Jerusalem ID. The Israeli Human Rights organizations B'tselem and Hamoked estimate that tens of thousands of persons in these categories will be incriminated by this order. Internationals visiting or working in the West Bank are also at risk.

This order and the deportations resulting from it could become a subtle and underhand way of reducing the Palestinian population in the West Bank by several thousands every year,

creating more space for illegal Israeli settlements. It is also a clear violation of International Law. First, it is a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibiting forced transfers and deportations of protected persons in occupied territory. Second, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights asserts the right of any person legally present in their territory to enjoy freedom of movement and choose their place of residence. Finally, under the Oslo Accords, Israel recognized the territorial unity of the West Bank and Gaza, in which freedom of movement was to be guaranteed. Deporting Palestinians from one occupied territory to another is not only a flagrant violation of IHL, but also violates previous agreements, further retards the peace process and undermines the possibility of a two-state solution.

Therefore Mr President:

- We call upon the Government of Israel to immediately rescind the order and discontinue its policy of deportation and transfer of population.
- We also call upon the Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps to ensure that the Government of Israel refrains from deporting and transferring civilians and to establish an international mechanism to closely monitor illegal acts that aim to change realities on the ground.

• Letter from WCC general secretary to the Methodist Church of Great Britain on the church's important and forward-looking resolutions regarding Just Peace for Palestine and Israel, 25 June 2010

Letter sent to Rev. David Gamble, president of Conference and Ms Christine Elliott, secretary, External Relations

Dear Mr Gamble and Ms Elliott,

Warm greetings to you from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and from the worldwide ecumenical family on the occasion of the 2010 annual UK National Methodist Conference in Portsmouth from 24 June – 1 July 2010.

We are aware that the conference will take up some crucial issues and that one of them focuses on the question of justice in Palestine and Israel. We have read with keen interest the well-researched document containing important proposals towards ending the occupation and bringing to fruition a Just Peace for Palestinians and Israelis.

Following the news about the conference, we see that you have been subject to strong criticisms aiming at diminishing the credibility of the document and alarm that adopting it would damage Jewish-Methodist relations in the UK.

The critics also targeted the WCC and one of its main Middle East programmes, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). Just as the Methodist Church in Great Britain has been unfairly accused of creating "historical distortions and bias", the EAPPI has been wrongly charged with "promoting anti-Israel agendas under the facade of peace".

We wanted to affirm what you have stated, that it is imperative that we listen to the "cry for solidarity of Palestinian Christians as expressed in the *Kairos* document" and to affirm that our commitment is for both Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The WCC has always encouraged actions that promote human dignity for all peoples. In listening to the Palestinian Christian voice, through the *Kairos* Palestine document, not only do we stand in a costly solidarity with our sisters and brothers there, but we also encourage them to continue to work for peace-making and peace-building in the region. This is a mission that is incumbent on all Churches in the ecumenical movement. The WCC stands in firm solidarity with The Methodist Church of Great Britain in its deliberations.

We thank you for your support to the WCC and its programmes and initiatives in the Middle East and join you in your prayers and discussions during this week so that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, may inspire you and strengthen you to proclaim the Good News for all, Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Lionel Osborn, president designate of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, regarding the important and forward-looking resolutions around the question of a Just Peace for Palestine and Israel, 2 July 2010**

Dear Mr Osborn,

Grace to you, and peace, through our Lord Jesus Christ!

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I write to congratulate you and Ms Ruth Pickles, vice-president designate, on your appointments to leadership of the Methodist Church of Great Britain at the recently held 2010 annual conference in Portsmouth. I would like also to send you our good wishes on the important and forward looking resolutions by your church around the question of a Just Peace for Palestine and Israel.

I wanted to express my admiration for the delegates for the quality of the debates, content and tone in which they were conducted. It is only such a transparent spirit that can provide a genuine space for a church body to develop church policy that embodies the Christian understanding that 'we are all one' in the Spirit and one in the Lord. I was deeply touched by the conclusion of the voting on the last resolution commending "all the peoples of the region to the loving care of the Almighty God" when you prayed together the Lord's Prayer. The symbolism was important but even more so the vital and indispensable spirit of determination to do justice.

Palestinian Christians will certainly take courage and strength from the implementation of the report's resolutions. They will be more courageous in denouncing all forms of violence and to invoke the need for enforcing international law by bringing an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. We trust that Methodists in Great Britain and, indeed, people everywhere will be influenced and impacted by your call to boycott goods from illegal Israeli

settlements as a pathway to a lasting and sustainable peace in the region. Such actions are visible proof of your irreversible conviction that God demands that we dare more than words.

The stated ideal that the British Methodists remain deeply "committed to relationships with our Brothers and Sisters of other faiths so that we act as agents of hope together" is the one tangible way to affirm our common humanity.

You have clearly recognized that your agenda is neither divisive in spirit nor in intent. The approved resolutions of the conference is a clear response to the aspirations for a Just Peace both by Palestinian Christians as well as a growing number of Jewish organizations, both inside Israel and worldwide.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I wish to once again reiterate our respect for the thoroughness of the process that preceded the inclusive decision-making. You have set parameters which will be a model worth replicating in many arenas. We join you in your "commitment to regular and informed prayer for the needs of those in region."

In Christian love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Dr Gradye Parsons, stated clerk of the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), on the occasion of the church's 219th General Assembly, expressing appreciation at the churches' continued expressions of solidarity with Israeli and Palestinian peace-makers, 2 July 2010**

Dear Dr Parsons, and participants in the 219th General Assembly:

Grace to you, and peace, through our Lord Jesus Christ!

On behalf of the World Council of Churches and your sisters and brothers in the ecumenical movement, I write to assure you of our prayers for God's blessing on your general assembly in the Twin Cities. May the gospel of Jesus Christ be at the heart of all your words and actions, so that the world may recognize the sincerity of your love and faith and come to believe through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Over many years, your partners around the world have come to appreciate the Presbyterian commitment to the church on earth as "a provisional demonstration of the kingdom of heaven". Through the history of the modern ecumenical movement, from the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh through last month's general uniting council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids, we who come from other Christian traditions have profited from Presbyterian and Reformed demonstrations of spiritual fervour, devotion, fellowship and ministry. And so we look forward to the outcomes of this assembly.

Please know that the World Council of Churches stands ready to offer any necessary support to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and to each of our member churches and other partners,

as we face together the great issues of our age. We are one in Christ, and together we are called to dialogue and cooperation. We share in the stewardship of God's diverse creation. We are part of a network of churches and believers who have the capacity to help one another better understand the underlying unity of creation amid all its diversity, and the common yearnings of humanity despite all political complexities.

In the coming year, we especially look forward to exploring the paths of peace when representatives of diverse churches and nations gather in Kingston, Jamaica during May 2011 for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

I am pleased to have delegated WCC participation in your assembly to Michel Nseir, who is responsible for the WCC programme in the Middle East. We know that the urgent issues of justice and peace in Palestine and Israel will be among the central focuses of the assembly's deliberation and appreciate the courageous leadership that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to exercise in solidarity with Israeli and Palestinian peace-makers. Michel has played an important role in the development of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum in which your church is particularly active. He is well equipped to share with you the joint actions and reflections of the ecumenical family to bring reconciliation and healing to all peoples in the region.

As you deliberate concerning the many pressing questions of our age – theological, social, missional, educational, diaconal and cultural – many of us, near and far, will be holding you close in mind and spirit, so that, out of your hearts, in Jesus' name, there may flow "rivers of living water" (Jn. 7: 38) to quench the thirst of those who long for human dignity, justice and peace.

In Christian love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Oral intervention delivered by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 18th Session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, regarding large-scale evictions and demolitions in Area C of the West Bank, 26 September 2011**

Thank you, Ms President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs would like to express its concern about the increasing large-scale evictions and demolitions in the area covering more than 60 per cent of the West Bank and controlled by Israel, known as Area C.

Area C never came under Israeli sovereignty, and was meant to be gradually transferred to Palestinian administration. But the Israeli authorities have consolidated Israel's grip on it. Most of the area has been reserved for military training or settlement expansion. Around 300,000 settlers currently live in illegal settlements in Area C versus around 150,000 Palestinians. The military authorities impose severe restrictions on Palestinian constructions and less than 1 percent of the zone is available for Palestinian development. This makes it

almost impossible for Palestinians living there to obtain building permits. Many are forced to build in defiance of military orders and face having their homes demolished.

In 2011, until September 20th, the Israeli authorities demolished 408 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C, making 804 people homeless,more than doubling its already bad record of 2010 (source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

As well as homes, the army demolished dozens of animal shelters and 20 rainwater collection facilities. Over 3,000 outstanding demolition orders include 18 targeting schools.

In September, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported that the Israeli authorities are planning to forcefully evict Bedouin in the West Bank from Area C. Around 27,000 Bedouin live in Area C and the Jerusalem periphery and stand to be affected.

The sharp increase in West Bank demolitions in 2011 shows that there is a conscious Israeli government policy to remove Palestinians from the area.

A *de facto* Israeli takeover of Area C will have profound implications for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It threatens the Palestinian Authority's state building project and makes a viable Palestinian state hard to envisage.

Under the Geneva Conventions, Israel has a duty to protect Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, to respect their right to a decent standard of living and is not allowed to transfer its own population to those territories.

Therefore, Ms President, we call:

1. The Government of Israel
   a. to immediately stop demolishing Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and rescind all demolition orders against Palestinian-owned structures, a policy which violates article 53 of the 4th Geneva Convention,
   b. to immediately cease confiscating Palestinian land in Area C for settlement construction
   c. to implement a fair and equitable system of water distribution that provides for the needs of Palestinian communities in Area C.

2. The Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps to ensure that the Government of Israel refrains from demolitions and evictions, in particular in occupied Area C, and for donors to hold the Government of Israel financially accountable for demolition of projects they have funded.

3. We also call on policy-makers and international donors to support projects that promote continued Palestinian life in Area C.

- **Solidarity visit to Palestine-Israel by the WCC general secretary, WCC moderator, director of the CCIA and other WCC staff, 28 August- 2 September 2010**

WCC delegation seeks just and inclusive peace in Palestine and Israel, 27 August 2010

At a time when there are signs of hope emerging from the churches in the Middle East around the conflict in Palestine and Israel, a World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation led by WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit will be travelling to the region to emphasize the need for a "Just Peace".

While planning for the visit was initiated several months ago, it now coincides with the start-up of peace negotiations 2 September in Washington, D.C., United States.

"The purpose of this visit is to support the churches in the region and to encourage all actors involved to make needed changes to the situation there," Tveit said prior to the visit.

The delegation, which includes WCC staff members and the moderator of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik, will be visiting with WCC member churches, ecumenical partners and leaders from the Jewish and Muslim communities as well as WCC partner agencies and political leaders. The visit is 28 August to 2 September.

"We want to reaffirm that the WCC as a fellowship of churches is working and praying for peace and justice for all people in the Holy Land," Tveit said. "The conflict in the region requires a political solution. All religious institutions and communities should work together for a Just Peace. This is essential for a reconciliation and healing process."

"We are aware of the extreme difficulties facing the negotiations beginning 2 September," he said. "We pray for those in charge of this important work and believe that the negotiations must be inclusive of all in the region who suffer because of this conflict and be based on principles of international law."

During the visit Tveit will also say that the *Kairos* Document, which was developed by Palestinian Christians in late 2009, is resonating in WCC member churches around the world.

"The WCC member churches are viewing this document as cry for justice coming from Palestinian Christians, whose human dignity is being diminished and denied," Tveit said.

The WCC has been encouraging its member churches to develop and coordinate active advocacy plans to address government, international bodies, interfaith partners and churches in the region to end the occupation of Palestinian territories and the suffering of both Israeli and Palestinian people.

The visit is also one part of an overall effort within the WCC leading to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, to be held in Jamaica, May 2011, where nearly one thousand people will gather to move forward the Ecumenical Declaration for Just Peace.

The WCC delegation will visit with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), which is a WCC-sponsored programme that brings people from around the world to Palestine-Israel to provide a protective presence to vulnerable communities. The ecumenical accompaniers monitor and report human rights activities and abuses and support Palestinians and Israelis working for peace.

Loving your neighbour in the Middle East, 31 August 2010

Military checkpoints are a way of life for Palestinians in Palestine and Israel. Each day tens of thousands of Palestinians move patiently through turnstiles and narrow caged walkways to go to work, school or home. It is a humiliating experience.

For the Israelis, it could be said that the checkpoints are also indirectly a part of their daily life. It is their sons and daughters who watch as the Palestinians move through the checkpoints to go home, to work, school or worship.

Some of the checkpoints, like the barrier at Shuhada Street in Hebron, lead to an empty, abandoned street with shuttered shops and empty apartments above the street. Palestinians can go only a certain distance along the street before they are turned back.

The checkpoints also carry a metaphorical notion tearing at any sense of neighbourliness that might have been part of the familial and religious upbringing of those entering the turnstiles and those watching them.

Deeply embedded in the religions of the Abrahamic tradition in this region, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, is the sense of loving your neighbour as being rooted in the adoration and love of God.

It is in this context that the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), delivered a sermon on the Good Samaritan this past Sunday, 29 August, at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, located in the old city of Jerusalem. He spoke in the course of a day in which his WCC delegation saw first-hand many of the barriers that separate people.

The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 describes the qualities of life as it comes forward in “the great commandment to love your neighbour,” Tveit said. The real question is who proved to be a good neighbour in this parable.

In the context of Palestine and Israel with their ever-present barriers and violence, all parties are deprived of fulfilling this purpose in life, to love God and their neighbour, he said. “Religion should not prevent us from doing that.”

Despite the complexities of the politics and religious differences which are steeped in the recent tragedies as much as historical events of Palestine and Israel, the story of the Good Samaritan exudes a very simple idea of “loving your neighbour”.

The story of the Good Samaritan is a story about a man who for whatever reason wanted to go to Jericho, Tveit said to the congregation at Church of the Redeemer. Along the way, his trip was interrupted by violence. “This story is perhaps more real than we want it to be,” Tveit said.

When approaching a checkpoint in Palestine and Israel it is hard not to think about neighbours, neighbourhoods and being a neighbour. For Tveit, “in the end everything is about loving your neighbour.”

It is a simple and perhaps naive message from the New Testament. How could such a message of loving your neighbour work in a context as complex as this?

Whom we should love is not so complicated, Tveit said. “Moral life is not very sophisticated: it is loving God, loving your neighbour and loving yourself,” he said.

Empty streets, separated neighbours

The manifestation of years of violence within Palestine and Israel has meant empty streets with abandoned and shuttered shops, towering walls and razor wire fences meant to keep some people out and others in. In the end, it has meant neighbours separated, suspicious and in fear of one another.

As Tveit and his colleagues walked the empty Shuhada Street which divides the Palestinian Authority-controlled area of Hebron from the Israeli-controlled area, the silence of the street spoke volumes.

They walked with members of the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The ecumenical accompaniers are volunteers from WCC member churches around the world who accompany Palestinians as they encounter checkpoints, or Israelis as they confront the policies of their government bent on splitting neighbourhoods rather than linking them.

As the group moved along the street, two of the accompaniers were called back to the checkpoint to observe a situation where a Palestinian was having difficulty moving through the checkpoint. In the end the situation was resolved.

The ecumenical accompaniers are always on call. Only Saturday night, in East Jerusalem, members of the Jerusalem team were observing a demonstration of Palestinians and Israelis who were voicing their opposition to the illegal occupation of some Palestinian homes by Israeli settlers.

At a T-junction in the road and under the illumination of street lights, the protestors stood on one side, a group of settlers at one corner across from them and the police on the other corner.

Toward the end of the protest, a man from the protestors’ side jumped into the street and yelled at the settlers, causing police to move quickly to intervene. Younger men came running from other directions and for a moment the potential for an escalation in violence was very real.

The ecumenical accompaniers observed and documented the unfolding events with cameras. They had seen all of this before. The situation subsided, and the groups went back to their respective corners until everyone went home later.

But along Shuhada Street in Hebron, which on maps is now a “red line”, where were all of the people? Where was the neighbourhood? At one time the street was a bustling market area with traders and buyers.

“Our neighbours need us to love,” Tveit said. “Religion is about loving God, loving your neighbour and loving yourself.”

The sign of hope Tveit found in the story of the Good Samaritan was not any reported repentance on the part of those who passed by the wounded traveller yet refused to help him. “That would make a good story,” he said.

"Our lack of ability for repentance does not limit God's ability to bring love and justice," Tveit said.

The fact is, even in the face of checkpoints and the separation of neighbours, indignity and violence, "you cannot take away the truth" of God's love and justice, he said. The parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrated that a long time ago.

Focus on human aspect of Holy Land conflict, says WCC leader, 1 September 2010
Politicians need to focus on the human face of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and not discard it in favour of their own political agendas, the head of the World Council of Churches has said in the Middle East.

"Politicians need to act and prevent this human tragedy," the WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, told *ENInews* after a visit to Palestinian families who have been evicted by Israelis from their homes in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheik Jarrah.

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the killing of four Israeli settlers near Hebron in the West Bank, 1 September 2010**

The Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, condemns the killings of the four Israeli settlers near Hebron in the West Bank on Tuesday and expresses his condolences to the affected families. He rejects any use of violence as a means to gain the much-desired and needed peace for this region.

"At a time when Palestinian and Israeli leaders are beginning negotiations, the extremists who encourage and legitimize violence must not be allowed to succeed", said Tveit in a statement.

"To bring security to both Israelis and Palestinians, the negotiations must stop the occupation and all the injustices that ordinary Palestinians experience each day", he continued.

The general secretary added that he and the WCC are praying for the success of the negotiations: "It is urgent that the leaders take the necessary steps toward a Just Peace and not bring another moment of disappointment and injustice to the people in the region."

- **Open message from WCC general secretary to Middle East negotiators in Washington, D.C. on the final status of Jerusalem, the future of Palestinian Christians and the need for a Just Peace in the region, 2 September 2010**

The message was addressed to U.S. President Barak Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

From the blessed city of Jerusalem I bring you greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

When I visit the Palestine and Israel region I carefully listen to the WCC member churches here and to our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers.

During this visit, the Palestinian Christian cry of faith, hope and love expressed through the *Kairos* Document has been particularly significant. This document now stands as their proclamation for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel, and a call to Christians around the world to join them in solidarity. Now is the time for a Just Peace. The Christians here pray for that; all peoples here need it desperately. The time of occupation and violence must end.

Equally important on this visit has been listening to the concerns of the local churches here that already has been expressed in their historic statement of 2006 on the final status of Jerusalem. Final negotiations on the status of Jerusalem should involve the heads of the local churches. Palestinian Christians are also concerned about their future here and about their status in Jerusalem. Their residency rights, as is the case with all Palestinians living in Jerusalem, including the basic human right to family life and family reunification, are threatened by severe restrictions currently imposed by the Israeli authorities. This must come to an end so husbands, wives and children may be together as one family.

They are also very much concerned by the discourse about religious identity of states in this region, which they fear will marginalize not only their presence and witness but also that of all Christians elsewhere in the region.

Any debate over the religious composition of a given state is an internal one. However, it should guarantee the principle of equality of all citizens in their rights and duties as human beings.

As the representative of the World Council of Churches and a brother to our fellow Christians in Jerusalem and throughout the Middle East, I pray that there is enough will to make the negotiations successful so that they lead to a Just Peace. Throughout the region the dignity and integrity of all people will be the highest aspiration of civil society and government.

May the Lord bless your deliberations starting today.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary, World Council of Churches

- **Statement of WCC general secretary denouncing the burning of the Alliance Church in Jerusalem, 2 November 2010**

The World Council of Churches strongly denounces the burning of the Alliance Church built in Jerusalem in 1897, which once hosted the Palestinian Bible College. This attack has caused considerable damage to significant parts of the building.

The WCC rejects all forms of extremism, including religious ones. We have in this incident another example that shows that as long as there is no Just Peace in Palestine and Israel, some groups will take advantage to transform the political conflict into a religious war. We hope that the burning of the church will be investigated by competent authorities and the perpetrators of the crime be brought to account.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

- **Resolution on the United States of America's veto against the UN Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the Palestinian Territories, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011**

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva from 16 to 22 February 2011, expresses its deep concern and disappointment that the United States of America vetoed a resolution at the UN Security Council, on 18th February 2011, condemning Israeli settlements in the Palestinian Territories as an obstacle to peace.

The member churches of WCC, while acknowledging the right of the State of Israel to exist in security within internationally recognized borders, point out that the settlement policy of the State of Israel violates international law and obstructs the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians with unforeseeable consequences for peace and stability in the whole Middle East.

The WCC central committee notes, on the other hand, that the support in favour of the resolution was overwhelming, as 14 out of 15 members of the UN Security Council have voted in favour of the Resolution, and some 130 countries co-sponsored the resolution.

Referring to the Cairo-speech of President Barak Obama, which raised high expectations for a Just Peace in the Middle East, the WCC central committee considers that the U.S. veto against the resolution contradicts the statement by the U.S. president, that "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements.[...] This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop."

The WCC central committee believes that the unilateral decision of the U.S.A. to veto the resolution is a deeply regrettable mistake and the central committee calls upon the government of the U.S.A., along with the other nations of the Security Council and the United Nations, to intensify efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in the region with respect to law and justice.

- **Report from meeting addressing the theme "Violence in the name of God? Joshua in changing contexts", Hofgeismar, Germany, 23-27 February 2011**

Churches say "No more violence in the name of God"

"Before God and our communities, we are responsible to Jews for the historical and ongoing realities of anti-Semitism, to Palestinians since the *Nakba*, to Muslim neighbours in the light of Islamophobia, to persons who are vulnerable, and to victims of colonial conquest, among others," said participants of a World Council of Churches (WCC) sponsored conference.

"Central to a justice-oriented interpretation of the Bible will be the nature of responsibility," reads the statement by participants.

The conference was held from 23 to 27 February at the Evangelical Academy of Hofgeismar, Germany. The meeting was organized by the WCC and its Palestine-Israel Ecumenical

Forum, in collaboration with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Evangelical Church in Kurhessen-Waldeck.

The event brought 45 Christian and Jewish scholars, theologians and students from 15 countries in North and South America, Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Together, they addressed the theme "Violence in the name of God? Joshua in changing contexts".

While focusing on the biblical text of Joshua, the final communiqué from the conference implied that this book, "if taken as prescriptive, can lead to dangerous conclusions".

The communiqué was adopted after three days of prayer, Bible studies and lectures reflecting on the exegetical, historical and contemporary aspects of the book of Joshua, violence in the biblical narratives and various interpretive approaches.

For many years the book of Joshua has been used to justify conquests and exploitation. This book was used in theological debates of the 16th century around the colonization of the Americas and by Afrikaner ideologists who named Zulus as the "black Canaanites"; even today, the book is used by some Christians and Jews to justify the occupation policies of Israel.

In line with the conclusions drawn at the WCC theological conference on "Promised Land" in Bern, Switzerland in 2008, the participants confirmed that the "Bible must not be utilized to justify oppression or supply simplistic commentary on contemporary events, thus sacralizing the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict and ignoring its sociopolitical, economic and historical dimensions."

New approach to read text of Joshua

Discussions at the conference pointed out that many valid interpretations of the text of Joshua are possible when they are approached from a variety of contexts. Participants agreed that a hermeneutical approach based on justice is the key to addressing this text.

Palestinian Christians at the conference shared how the book of Joshua has been used by "powerful parties to justify the continuing occupation of Palestinian territories and settlement policies," thereby alienating Palestinian Christians "not only from their land but from the bulk of their Christian scriptural canon".

Rev. Jens Nieper, who represented the EKD in the preparatory committee of the conference, encouraged the participants to "bring these new insights to their communities, theological faculties and churches, so they may be inspired in their struggles for peace and freedom in the name of God."

Rabbi Dr Tovias Ben Chorin, a Jewish scholar based in Berlin, who led a Bible study during the conference, pointed out the universality of Bible reading and how the scriptures speak to people in different contexts. "The Word is more powerful than any bullet; bullets are shot and gone, while the Word continues working inside you, changing you," he said.

Rev. Dr Jamal Khader, a Palestinian Roman Catholic priest who is dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the Bethlehem University, voiced his appreciation for the conference.

"We deal with violence every day. Palestinians are suffering a permanent violence intended to expel them from their lands. Here we have discussed it and raised awareness on this situation," said Khader.

The statement from the conference highlighted German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's hard-won insight of reading the Bible "from below".

"The biblical narratives empower those who are oppressed to become active agents of their own emancipation," the statement concludes.

- **Oral intervention delivered at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th Session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories regarding evictions and demolitions in East Jerusalem, 21 March 2011**

Thank you, Mr President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs would like to express its concern about the large-scale evictions and demolitions in occupied East Jerusalem.

In 2010, there were 82 demolitions in occupied East Jerusalem (27 residential, 55 non-residential), forcibly displacing 128 people, including 67 children, and otherwise affecting 291, including 125 children. About half of these demolitions took place in the last two months of 2010. In addition, during this year the inhabitants of about 70 houses were evicted.

In 2011 so far, there have been 10 demolitions in occupied East Jerusalem (4 residential ones, 6 non-residential). As a result, 22 people, including 11 children, lost their homes and another 45, including 30 children, were otherwise affected. Most of the demolitions were carried out by the Jerusalem Municipality.

The consequences for families can be devastating: in addition to losing their homes, their main source of physical and economic security, families are faced with high legal fees, fines and charges, including the cost of their own eviction or house demolition.

Such evictions and demolitions almost exclusively target Palestinians and appear to be part of a systematic programme to make way for the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, shifting the demographic make-up of the city in favour of Israeli residents and clearly undermining prospects for a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and a sustainable two-state solution.

We would also like to bring to the attention of the Human Rights Council, another case where the Government of Israel, and more particularly, the Ministry of Interior, is showing disrespect for basic human rights. It has been now over six months that the Minister of Interior, Mr Eliyahu Yishai is denying the renewal of the residency permit of the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, HG Suheil Dawani, who is a Palestinian born citizen. This is in clear contradiction to Israel's recognition of the 13 heads of churches in Jerusalem, and the right of their elected Patriarchs and Bishops to reside in the city. If this practice is to be confirmed under the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, it will be an unprecedented action, which will

have grave consequences on the "status quo" and on the presence of the historic indigenous Christians in the city.

Therefore, Mr President, we call:

1. The Government of Israel
   a. to immediately stop demolishing Palestinian structures in occupied East-Jerusalem as well as cease issuing new demolition orders and freeze all pending orders.
   b. to stop eviction of Palestinians from their homes in occupied East-Jerusalem in order to transfer their own population in contravention with the Geneva 4th Convention and
   c. to renew unconditionally the residency permit of the legally elected Anglican Bishop of the city.

2. The Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps to ensure that the Government of Israel refrains from demolitions and evictions, in particular in occupied East-Jerusalem, as well as deporting and transferring civilians and to establish an international mechanism to closely monitor illegal acts that aim to change realities on the ground.

Finally, allow me, Mr President, to reiterate the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs' condemnation of the despicable assassination of five members of an Israeli family in the illegal settlement of Itamar on March 12. The World Council of Churches condemns all kinds of violence and reaffirms its position that the on-going conflict between Palestinians and Israelis cannot be resolved through the use of force but only through the implementation of related UN resolutions and through a negotiated Just Peace.

- **Oral intervention delivered by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 16th session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories Art. 37 of the convention on the rights of the child, 21 March 2011**

Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
Interactive dialogue with SR Richard Falk.

Mr President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches welcomes Mr Richard Falk's latest report and commends him for the excellent work he has been doing despite the continuing refusal of the Government of Israel to allow him to visit the occupied Palestinian territories.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has followed the same trends through its ecumenical aonitor and report human rights abuses. Through their regular presence in particular in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah they witnessed the eviction of families from their home, the arrest of children mostly in the middle of the night followed by detention and interrogations practice in gross violation of international law, in particular Art. 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The acceleration of house demolitions and numerous announcements of new settlement constructions in the last two months of 2010 are particularly worrying as they are adding more “facts on the ground” in advance of negotiations.

Recalling its Resolution on Jerusalem issued in September 2000, the WCC continues to encourage efforts to build an open, inclusive and shared city where free access to Holy Places and freedom of worship is assured for people of all faith. We also still firmly believe that Jerusalem can be a source of peace, stability and coexistence rather than of division and conflict that destroy human dignity and hope.

We would like to support the recommendations of special rapporteur Richard Falk and call upon the Human Rights Council to enforce them. In particular, measures to be taken to ensure that no child is arrested, detained and interrogated in contravention to the children rights.

- **Statement by WCC general secretary: expression of hope for Palestinian unity, 10 May 2011**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) welcomes the recent agreement ending political division and seeking the achievement of national unity reached recently in Cairo, Egypt between two Palestinian movements – Fatah and Hamas.

The signing of this agreement, for an interim unity government and fixing a date for a general election in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2012, is a significant milestone and promise to forge a Palestinian consensus for lasting and Just Peace in the region.

These two main Palestinian parties were caught in a vicious cycle of enmity and hatred, diverting their attention from a common goal of peace and reconciliation.

It is heartening that the leaders of the two groups now show a willingness to respond to peoples’ aspirations for dignity, freedom, civil rights and equality. The signing of the agreement provides opportunities for Palestinians to pave new avenues of cooperation and relations that will facilitate a healing process within Palestinian communities. It is significant that this agreement comes at a time when historical trends of regional political changes are propelling new political paradigms.

The WCC hopes that the Cairo agreement will not only facilitate a process of mutual trust and confidence among Palestinian groups, but will further enhance a process of ending Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and achieve a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine and strengthen the commitment to find solutions without using violence.

To realize the goal of Just Peace in the region, the international community now has the challenge and responsibility to accompany this process. The international community must also assume a proactive and positive role in guaranteeing the agreement be kept alive actively discouraging any external conditions that may cause a breakdown.

At a time when the WCC prepares to hold the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) in Kingston, Jamaica, 17-25 May, we find it important to affirm our commitment to Just Peace in a world afflicted by conflict and violence. It is our fervent hope and prayer that a

more congenial atmosphere be created in order to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Israel/Palestine. We pray this will be attained soon.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on the application of Palestine to become a full member state of the United Nations, 28 September 2011**

The World Council of Churches and member churches around the world have pursued peace with justice for both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples for decades. Like much of the international community, we are now watching to see if peace and justice will be served in how the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly process the application of Palestine to become a full member state of the UN.

This request must be considered in the light of numerous resolutions passed at the UN Security Council and General Assembly, supporting a two-state solution. They are the basis for a peace not yet established in a conflict which is also constantly influencing other conflicts in the world. It is now a unique opportunity for the UN to take important decisions to fulfil its role and mandate according to the UN Charter, to make peace with justice prevail between Israelis and Palestinians, and with their neighbours.

Yesterday's announcement in Israel of plans to build 1,100 more housing units on occupied territory is a stark reminder of why sober deliberation, genuine courage and responsible action by the United Nations are necessary. The United Nations is the voice of the international community in this dispute, a voice that has been raised many times to lay out the basis for an equitable peace between two states.

Negotiations should not be seen as an alternative to the UN acceptance of the Palestinian application for membership. Different initiatives to build stability in the region should go hand in hand.

In the people's movements across the Arab world, peoples are standing up for their freedom and dignity in order to establish democratic states with the rule of law. Now it is appropriate that the United Nations actively supports the establishment of a democratic Palestinian state.

Together with the heads of churches in Jerusalem, we "*feel the need to intensify the prayers and diplomatic efforts for peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and see that this is the most appropriate time for such an opportunity*".

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 19th session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 19 March 2012**

Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
General debate

Thank you, Ms President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches would like to express its concern at the rising number and severity of Israeli settlers attacks in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). Our monitors based in the WestBank have witnessed many attacks over the past year and indicated that they are becoming more frequent and more severe. This is supported by UNOCHA statistics, which has reported a significant rise in attacks resulting in Palestinian casualties and property damage, up by 32% in 2011 compared to 2010, and by over 144% compared to 2009.

These attacks take place in an atmosphere of impunity. Over 90% of investigations of settler attacks reported by Palestinians resulted in no charges being brought against violators. Under International Law, Israel has a duty to protect civilians in the area it occupies and cannot transfer its own population in the occupied territories as it is doing through the settlements.

Settler violence, whether in the form of physical attacks, damage to livelihoods or other forms of harassment, is an important factor pushing Palestinians to leave communities in Area C of the West Bank, and move into Areas A and B. In 2011, 139 people moved from Area C into Areas A and B due to settler violence.

Forced displacement undermines Palestinian presence in Area C and in the long run weakens prospects for a viable Palestinian state.

Therefore Ms President,

1. We call on the Government of Israel to fulfil its duty under international law to protect civilians in the territories it is occupying:
   - by properly investigating and prosecuting , in a thorough, impartial and independent manner, settlers who commit acts of violence and
   - by immediately desisting from all policies leading to forced displacement.

2. We also urge the Human Rights Council to take firm steps to ensure that the Government of Israel fulfils its international obligations to protect civilians in the territories it is occupying.

- **Oral intervention by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council's 20th session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, 2 July 2012**

Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
General debate

Thank you, Ms President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs would like to express its concern about the increasing large-scale evictions and demolitions in the West-Bank.

This year, Israeli authorities have already destroyed 330 civilian Palestinian structures, displacing 530 people, more than half of them children and affecting another 2,100 . The number of those displaced has risen by 87% compared to 2010 (in terms of monthly averages).

In this regard, we would like to raise in particular the case of the village of Susiya in the South of the West-Bank that is surrounded by Israeli settlements. Residents of Susiya are from the area, have been there for decades and own the land. They have been building without permits. Being on the so called AreaC of the West Bank (as per the Oslo Accord) they depend on Israeli Civil Administration for a building permit, which they rarely get. It is to be noted here that Area C is no longer mentioned in any Israeli map, since 2010. This seriously undermines the viability and contiguity of a potential future Palestinian state.

Residents of Susyia are now facing a demolition order, following a legal petition by a settler organization that will affect over 50 structures. 160 people, including 120 children, could be displaced. Structures include homes, animal shelters, water cisterns, a green energy electricity station, a school, a health clinic and a cultural centre, mostly funded by international donors.

In this regard, we would like to stress that Israel is an occupying power on this land and therefore bound by International Humanitarian Law. It is very clear in The Hague and the 4th Geneva Conventions that the occupier cannot destroy or seize property on territory it is occupying, except if it is “imperatively demanded by the necessities of war”, which is clearly not the case in Susiya.

Therefore, Ms President, we call:

1. The Government of Israel
   a. to immediately stop demolishing Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and rescind all demolition orders against Palestinian-owned structures, a policy which violates article 53 of the 4th Geneva Convention,
   b. to immediately cease confiscating Palestinian land in Area C for settlement construction.

2. The Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps:
   a. to ensure that the Government of Israel refrains from demolitions and evictions, in particular in occupied Area C,
   b. to advocate for the transfer of the planning authority in Area C to Palestinians,
   c. for donors to hold the Government of Israel financially accountable for demolition of projects they have funded.

3. We also encourage the Human Rights Council to set up the announced fact-finding mission on settlements.

- **Joint written dubmission by WCC and Pax Christi International at the UN Human Rights Council's 21st session on the status of Jerusalem, 10–28 September 2012**

Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches call for an urgent resolution to the issues destabilizing Jerusalem, and applauds the Human Rights Council's attention for the numerous and disastrous violations of human rights in Jerusalem and the Council of the European Union's recommitment to forging a lasting peace.[85]

Jerusalem has a special status, given its pluralistic and religious importance. The ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the city threaten its peaceful future, and due to its special status, violations in the city do not only affect its residents but the global community at large. To reach a peaceful future, the five components of the city (three religions and two peoples) must be taken into consideration and given satisfaction, and due respect guaranteed to national or religious differences.

In UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947, the international community decided that:

Jerusalem should have special status and a "corpus separatum" was designated for the whole area of greater Jerusalem that would be under UN trusteeship.[86] However, as a consequence of the war of 1948, Jerusalem became divided between the Western part that was controlled by Israel and the Eastern part that was controlled by Jordan. In the war of 1967, Israel occupied the Palestinian Eastern part of Jerusalem, together with the rest of the Western side of the Jordan River. Israel claimed Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel and annexed the East-Jerusalem, contrary to international law. The international community, the Holy See, the World Council of Churches and Pax Christi International do not recognize the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem. The international community considers East Jerusalem occupied territory and therefore international humanitarian law is applicable in addition to international human rights law.

UNGA Resolution 181 reflected the special circumstances in the city that are defined by two dimensions, religious and political. On the political level, two nationalities, Israeli and Palestinian, are present and have political rights in the city. On the religious level: three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have religious rights, and require from both political entities to guarantee free access to the respective holy places, for all believers, local and international. Exclusivism from any side, political or religious, will harm the unique identity of the city and the harmony among all those who are concerned, all its sons and daughters. Jerusalem cannot be merely Israeli or merely Palestinian, neither merely Muslim or Christian or Jewish. It should be shared by all.

Since 1967, Israel has built vast Jewish-only settlements on occupied Palestinian land, including the Eastern part of Jerusalem. These settlements violate the Fourth Geneva Convention that prohibits the occupying power to transfer its population into occupied territory.[87] The Israeli E-1 plan that connects the very large Ma'aleh Adumim settlement toJerusalem cuts the West Bank in two and has completed the encirclement of East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities restrict access to Jerusalem to Palestinians from the West Bank and the

[85] See Council conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process; 3166th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, May 2012, www.concilium.europa.eu/Newsroom

[86] Read United Nations Resolutions on Jerusalem nr. 181 of 1948; nr.242 of 1967; and nr. 478 of 1980: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_UN_resolutions_concerning_Israel/Jerusalem

[87] Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to Civilian Persons in Time of War, article

movement between the north and south of the West Bank. The city is no longer the heart of Palestinian political, economic and cultural life. Despite international pressure, the Jerusalem municipality has over the past months approved plans to construct new housing units in Pisgat Zeev settlement and hotel rooms and housing units in East Talpiot.[88]

In its advisory opinion of 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that "The construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem and its associated regime, is contrary to international law" and that it should be dismantled.[89] Until today, construction continues. The separation barrier divides people from their workplaces, farmhouses from their land, and villages from sources of water. The wall has seriously harmed the Palestinian economy, causing a de *facto* annexation of more land, often the most fertile areas. Religious places such as Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour are separated from Jerusalem by this wall. For Christians, the town of Bethlehem is inextricably linked to Jerusalem. Walls now divide Jerusalem and separate it from its natural hinterland.

The Israeli Jerusalem municipality rarely grants building permits to Palestinians and therefore many houses are constructed without a licence. Under this claim that they are unlicensed, houses in East Jerusalem are being demolished. On 13 July 2010 the Jerusalem Municipality demolishedsix structures in East Jerusalem: two houses that were under construction and awarehouse in Issawiyya neighbourhood, two populated houses in Jabal Mukabber neighbourhood and another house in Beit Hanina neighbourhood. It should be noted that this is the first time in about eight months that the municipality has demolished houses in East Jerusalem.[90]

Since 1967, Palestinian Jerusalemites have the status of permanent residents in the city. This status can be revoked by the Israeli authorities under certain circumstances. Israeli Haaretz newspaper recently described it as follows: "Citizens of Israel can leave the country for any length of time, and their citizenship and all their rights are theirs in perpetuity. But when it comes to Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, Israel applies draconian regulations whose covert intent is to bring about the expulsion of as many Palestinians as possible from their home city."[91] Palestinian Jerusalemites do not have political institutions to refer to since Orient House was closed by the Israeli authorities. Israeli efforts to deny Palestinians political presence in Jerusalem were again illustrated by the Israeli High Court decision in June 2010 to revoke the residency rights of three Jerusalemite Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and to deport them. In addition, In June 2002, the Israeli Government issued a"temporary law" depriving citizenship to the husband/wife of any Jerusalem resident or Israeli citizen. Practically, the wife/husband, who is from the West Bank, will not be granted residency in Jerusalem or Israel and therefore cannot join the spouse.

Recent developments have continued on an alarming trend. The Knesset has approved a pilot programme to issue new magnetic cards. There is grave concern that the process will further restrict the movements of some inhabitants and may force out residents who are unable to provide proof of residency. This could result in the halving of the Christian population alone, from 8000 to 5000 inhabitants. This comes on top of this year's Easter restrictions, where a

[88] According to IrAmim, "New construction in PisgatZeev and East Talpiot", http://www.ir-amim.org.il/Eng/?CategoryID=327&ArticleID=740 accessed 24 July 2010.
[89] Press release ICJ, 9 July 2004, http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=4&p3=6&case=131&k=5a
[90] According to IrAmim, "House Demolitions", http://www.ir-amim.org.il/Eng/?CategoryID=327&ArticleID=738, accessed 24 July 2010.
[91] "The Silent Expulsion" in *Haaretz*, 22 June 2010, http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-silent-expulsion-1.297577

number of Palestinian Christians were prevented from entering East Jerusalem for worship.

Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches applaud the position taken by the Council of the European Union during their Foreign Affairs Council meeting:[92] inter-alia, its expression of concern regarding on-going illegal settlements; forced transfers of local populations; the worsening of living conditions for Palestinians, and the non-issuance of Palestinian building permits; that the EU reiterates its non-recognition of changes to the pre-1967 borders including Jerusalem; its reiteration of the urgent need to negotiate the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states. In this regard, we also refer to the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah recommendation to activate and make more visible the implementation of the EU policies on East Jerusalem, for instance by avoiding to have Israeli security and/or protocol accompanying high ranking officials from member states when visiting the Old City/East Jerusalem.

Recommendations for the Human Rights Council:

- Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches call for the immediate cessation of further illegal demolitions and transfers, and a fair and transparent process for the registration and freedom of movement of inhabitants.
- Furthermore, Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches recommend the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur for Jerusalem. Given Jerusalem's importance for Muslims, Jews and Christians around the world and the serious threat that ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the city pose to the possibility of reaching a just and lasting peace, it is important that a special monitoring mechanism for international law violations is adopted.
- Finally, Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches urge the adoption of a resolution calling on all members of the UN to guarantee full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in East Jerusalem, e.g., by avoiding to invest in companies involved in construction of settlements or demolition of houses in East Jerusalem. Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches firmly reassert their support for an accessible and just Jerusalem where inhabitants of all faiths can live, work and worship side by side in peace.

• Statement of concern from WCC general secretary on the escalation of violence in Gaza and Israel, 16 November 2012

The WCC is closely following the tragic violent developments that occurred the last days in Gaza and Israel, which have resulted in the loss of many lives, including children and women. This violence should stop immediately so that the lives of civilians, who are always the main victims, be spared. The loss of peoples' precious lives in the eyes of God, on both sides, cannot be accepted as a price to be paid for the unresolved political problems and political agendas.

[92] See Council conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process; 3166th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, 14 May 2012, www.concilium.europa.eu/Newsroom

The WCC urges both sides to cease hostilities, and ensure civilians will be protected. We call upon the UN Security Council and the Arab League to take immediate resolutions and measures to put an end to the escalation of violence, in the interest of both parties.

The WCC reiterates its call for the end of the six-year blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel. A fast facts sheet report issued in June 2012 by the UN OCHA in the occupied Palestinian territories reminded us of the dramatic unbearable humanitarian situation of the population in the Gaza Strip. As Israel continues to control Gaza by air, land and sea, the international humanitarian law holds its Government responsible and accountable for the safety of all civilians in Gaza and Israel.

The WCC declares that the rocket attacks from Gaza into civilian communities in Israel, which are reprehensible and never justifiable, might also have very negative effects at a time when Palestinians are seeking international support of, and recognition by, the international community for a future viable and contiguous state.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to President Mahmoud Abbas highlighting the Palestinian resilience and peaceful resistance to the occupation, 16 January 2013**

Your Excellency,

It is with deep appreciation that we have received your Christmas greetings at the World Council of Churches (WCC). Coming from the Holy Land, the very place where our Christian faith is rooted, made those greetings rather special.

Christians around the world watched with admiration how Palestinians celebrated the Christmas event asserting their determination to never give up their legitimate rights, and to remain steadfast in their ancestral land. Palestinian resilience is an instruction and inspiration for others who face similar situations of oppression and dispossession in other areas of the world. The very recent installation of the “Babel-Shams” village near Jerusalem is one of the many examples of civil and peaceful resistance to the occupation, which gives a sign of hope for many people aspiring for freedom and dignity.

As Your Excellency might be aware, the World Council of Churches has always supported the self-determination of the Palestinian people ever since they were dispossessed and expelled from their land in 1948. Our stance does not stem from a preference for one people over the other. It comes from our yearning for justice and human dignity for all peoples. This is why we believe that Palestinians and Israelis will be able to live side by side in peace and prosperity. Through the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum – our main instrument of action- we remain firm proponents of a peace based on justice for the Palestinians and security for both peoples.

The weakening of the peace process is a matter of profound concern for the international community as a whole. The delay in finding a Just Peace agreement cannot but further the

escalation of violence, as we have witnessed in the last few months. Still, we rejoice in the signs of hope–the evolution of people's resistance in creative and innovative dimensions, the widening of international solidarity, especially among churches thanks to the common Palestinian Christian voice that was expressed in the "*Kairos*" Palestine Document: "Moment of Truth", and the historic vote in the United Nations recognizing Palestine.

Churches around the world will continue to vigourously be engaged in prayer and action for reconciliation, healing and a Just Peace for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Christmas celebrations around the world invite us all to respond positively to God's reconciling love, by becoming peace-makers and messengers of justice.

As we pursue our journey on the path of peace-building the World Council of Churches pledges to be steadfast to the Palestinian aspiration for justice in the here and now of our times.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Oral intervention at the UN Human Rights Council 22nd Session, calling on the government of Israel to cease using live ammunition against civilians and to hold independent investigations into incidents causing death or injury of civilians, 18 March 2013**

Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
General debate

Thank you, Mr President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches would like to express its concern about the increasing use of excessive force by the Israeli army against Palestinian civilians. We are particularly concerned by the casualties resulting from the use of live ammunitions that caused the death of six civilians including two children during the month of January.

According to UNOCHA, initial evidence indicates that two of the victims were shot in the back and another two in the head. In none of the cases the victims appeared to have posed a threat that would justify the use of live ammunition or recourse to lethal force[93].

We are concerned that this growing trend in the use of these ammunitions will trigger more violence in the region.

Under international law, (Art 6, ICCPR which states that "no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life"), Israel has an obligation to respect the right to life[94]. Moreover, Israel as an occupying power has a duty to protect the Palestinian population in the OPT. The Israeli

[93] UNOCHA, Humanitarian Monitor Monthly Report, January 2013.
[94] Art. 6, UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Right.

security forces are also bound by the general rule of necessity and proportionality. According to those principles, live ammunitions can only be used when unavoidable in order to protect life, which was not the case in any of those six incidents.[95]

Therefore, Mr President, we call on:

1. The Government of Israel
   a. to cease using live ammunition against civilians and abide by the principle of necessity and proportionality in the use of force.
   b. to hold independent, prompt and effective investigations into incidents causing death or injury of civilians.

2. The Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps:
   to ensure that all incidents of use of live ammunition against civilians are investigated and that internal regulations are consistent with international standards.

- **Oral intervention at the UN Human Rights Council 23rd session, calling on the government of Israel to facilitate the access of all children to school, 10 June 2013**

Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
General debate

Thank you, Mr President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches would like to express its concern about the continuing effects of the occupation on education in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The occupation is generating enormous stress and psychological damage on children and is detrimental to an appropriate education. In addition to the general stress, military incursions and violence, damage and destruction of properties and schools, arrest and detention of children and youth, restriction on movement, restrictions on building or developing educational infrastructure, as well as displacement have had a strong negative impact on education.

Children face a range of dangers and obstacles on their way to and from school. They are confronted with delays and harassment during searches at military checkpoints. They must navigate around other types of closures and obstacles on their way to school and pass through closed military zones while being exposed to the risks of settler and military violence on their school commutes. This is specifically worrying as there has been an alarming increase of attacks on schools in recent years.

[95] Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (adopted by the UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, 1990) and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (adopted by General Assembly resolution 34/169, 17 December 1979).

This results in drop-out, lack of attendance, deterioration of the quality of learning, as well as separation of families in their efforts to ensure that their children and youth continue their education. Girls are affected disproportionately as they are more likely to stop attending school when faced with harassment, violence and intimidation.

Depriving children of the right to education is not only a human concern; it is an obstacle to the building of a viable and healthy future for Palestinians.

Therefore, Mr President, we call on:

1. The Government of Israel
   a) to facilitate the access of all children to school
   b) to ensure their safety during their commute to school
   c) to stop demolishing schools and related structures

2. The Human Rights Council and the international community to take firm steps:
   a) to ensure that the Government of Israel complies with the UN Convention on the rights of the child and the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, which both emphasise the importance of access to quality education for all children
   b) for donors to hold the Government of Israel financially accountable for demolition of schools they have funded.

Saudi Arabia

- **Statement by WCC general secretary regarding the Fatwa of Saudi Arabia's grand mufti endorsing the destruction of churches, 18 April 2012**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has expressed great appreciation for recent comments by Mehmet Görmez, head of the Religious Affairs Directorate in Turkey, who sharply criticized the *Fatwa* (religious order) of Saudi Arabia's grand mufti endorsing the destruction of churches, criticizing it as baseless and against Islamic principles.

In his interview appearing in Today's Zaman on 14 April, Görmez said that Muslim leaders in Islamic countries are responsible for the wellbeing of non-Muslim minorities. He openly condemned the recent statement by the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, who reportedly called for the destruction of all churches in the Gulf.

"Such a statement has nothing to do with Islam's fundamental sources, with the agreements the prophet Muhammad signed with non-Muslim groups," Görmez is quoted as describing the statement as unacceptable, completely lacking any validity in Islam.

"All over the world, Muslims have started to live together with members of other civilizations. That's why we need to rediscover our long-standing culture of living together," he added.

The WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit applauded Görmez' stance of promoting peaceful co-existence among religious communities.

"As our member churches in Turkey have been advocating for the rights of Christian minorities and interreligious cooperation in plural situation like theirs, we appreciate Görmez' stance of promoting peaceful co-existence," said Tveit.

He went on to say that "the WCC has long been engaged in interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam, and therefore endorses the condemnation of justifying violence in the name of any religion."

Tveit also called Görmez' reference to the issue of the Halki Theological School in Heybeliada, Istanbul a "hopeful sign". The Halki Theological School was closed in 1971, and has remained a major concern for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, though theological education has been significant for the Armenian Patriarchate as well as for WCC member churches in Turkey, including both the Greek and Armenian churches.

In his interview, Görmez said, "I believe it doesn't befit the grandiosity of the civilization we built on this territory for Orthodox citizens to have to send their children to Greece or for Armenian citizens to have to go to Armenia to be educated as clergymen." He stressed the need for a timely resolution of the Halki Theological School issue.

In March 2010, the WCC general secretary visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and strongly advocated for the reopening of the Theological School of Halki.

Syria

- **Letter of solidarity from the WCC's general secretary to the churches in Syria, expressing concern regarding the recent events in Syria, 17 May 2011**

Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

It is with great concern that we have been witnessing the recent events in Syria, the land from where St. Paul spread the good news of love, peace and justice to the entire inhabited world.

It is very sad to see that, in this same land, the widespread use of violence and force since early March have left hundreds of people dead and wounded. We cannot but hope and pray that this cycle of violence will immediately end and the reforms that the Syrian government has promised will be soon implemented in order to restore peace and civility.

We are confident that your church, rooted in this land, and with a long historic experience of positive engagement in the life of your society, will contribute to the peace-building efforts in the country. Your role in providing a space for national dialogue in order to address in a constructive manner the citizens' demands for reforms and move towards social justice and cohesion is crucial – now more than ever before.

As you know, peoples in the whole Middle East, and especially Christians, are facing unprecedented challenges. The aspirations of a population for freedom cannot be suppressed and we hope that the changes that will take place will lead to equal citizenship. There are some signs of hope that emerged from many places, where respect for human rights and the rule of law have become an indicator of a positive change.

In this letter, we wanted to assure you that the World Council of Churches will mobilize the member churches and partners to reinforce a positive engagement for the churches in the region, in the life of the nations to which they belong. The continuous presence and active participation of Christians in the life of the entire region has been a remarkable witness to the Christian faith even in times of torment and suffering at various junctures.

Finally, let me, together with the central committee members who met last February here in Geneva, assure you that

"God's justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths have always guided WCC policy concerning the region. The WCC continues to believe that the core challenge for the churches, but also for the whole ecumenical family, is to witness to God's justice in the midst of unjust occupations, deprivation of freedom, and oppression. The irrevocable call is to courageously challenge the sources and structures of these injustices, as well as the authorities that perpetuate them".

We will continue to pray for the people of Syria, its government, and for those who continue to suffer there due to the unrest.

May our risen Lord strengthen you in your mission and always keep you in His love and under His protection.

Yours sincerely in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Statement by WCC general secretary calling to end the violence in Syria, 9 August 2011**

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I express my deep concern in this time of conflict for the people of Syria from every background and belief. I appeal to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to renounce violence at once, and to re-dedicate themselves and their country to the pursuit of dialogue, healing and peace.

In the wake of so many deaths, it is particularly urgent that the army and government security agencies cease the indiscriminate use of force, ensuring the citizens' rights to free assembly and expression, pursuit of political progress and basic human dignity. All governments have an obligation to protect the lives and dignity of their citizens, and to protect their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

From the government and on all sides there has been a stated desire for national reform. Now is the time to end the violence and enter a process of dialogue leading to democratic change.

At the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, convened by the World Council of Churches in May 2011, in Kingston, Jamaica, more than 1,000 participants included these words in their message to the world:

"With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments."

It is in that spirit that we call upon all who have been caught in the tragic cycle of confrontation within Syria: Stop the violence and killing. Seek a Just Peace for all.

May God bless Syria, and heal the wounds of the nation.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Message from WCC executive committee to all Churches in Syria, extending solidarity as they face enormous challenges due to the ongoing violence in the country, 20 February 2012**

We, the members of the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting from 14 to 17 February 2012 in Bossey, Switzerland, greet you in the name of the Triune God who dwells among the people to inspire us with hope for peace with justice.

As we are participating in the meeting of the executive committee of the WCC, we take this opportunity to assure the churches, Christians in Syria and the entire Syrian people of our prayers that peace and reconciliation may soon prevail in your country. While we pray, we are reminded that Syria is the land from whence St. Paul spread the Good News of love, peace and justice to the world.

The members of the executive committee who represent WCC constituencies from various parts of the world have discussed the current situation of turmoil in Syria. The report of the WCC general secretary to the executive committee shared information about the "ecumenical conversation on emerging trends in Syria" that was held in Geneva on 9-10 December 2011. We were also informed that about twenty church leaders from all confessional traditions in Syria came together to address their challenges and concerns and to envision their goals and expectations for the future of the Christian presence and witness in the region. We trust that the Christians in Syria are determined to find ways to be messengers of love and to convey the peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hostility and violence.

At the last central committee meeting in February 2011, the WCC reiterated its principles that guide the council's policy in the whole Middle East region. These principles include:

"*God's justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect forhuman dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths"*.
(Minute on the Presence and Witness of Christians in the Middle East, WCC central committee, February 2011)

On behalf of the WCC, the general secretary sent a letter addressed to the Church leaders in Syria, in May 2011, which expressed the Council's deep concern over the widespread violence and the indiscriminate use of force since early March 2011. The general secretary

expressed the hope that the cycle of violence will end immediately. Unfortunately, military action and repression have increased and violence has spread over many parts of the country, resulting in the loss of several thousand lives and tens of thousands wounded, internally displaced or forced to find refuge in neighbouring countries and in the whole region. In August 2011, a short statement was also issued condemning the violence.

We are aware of the fact that this is indeed a difficult and crucial moment in the history of your nation and people. Many Christians in Syria also feel uncertain about their future.

We strongly support the important message by three heads of churches in Syria, His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV, His Holiness Patriarch Zakka I, and His Beatitude Patriarch Gregorios III, that was issued on 15 December 2011 to their communities and all citizens in Syria, in which they clearly condemned "*the use of any type of violence*" and called for the "*respect of the principles of justice, freedom, human dignity, socialjustice and citizenship rights*".The heads of the churches encouraged the people not tofear and not to lose their hope.

We are confident that the churches in Syria, which are deeply rooted in the land, and have developed a long historic experience of engagement in the life of the society, will have an important role in a national dialogue especially in this critical and difficult moment. We are hopeful that such a dialogue will lead to a new reality: a society built on peace with justice, human rights and human dignity, the bases for living together in diversity and mutual respect.

We pray and hope that the ongoing situation of military repression and violence will end soon, and the movements seeking democracy and freedom will achieve their goals through peaceful and nonviolent means. Our prayer and hope is that the current unrest will not undermine the historical and human ties between Christians and Muslims in Syria, as well as in the entire region. We learn from your courage and steadfastness when you remain rooted in your faith and promote Christian ethical values in such critical moments.

In response to the ongoing conflict in your country, we are calling upon WCC member churches to engage in concrete actions of solidarity with you during this time of difficulties. As a fellowship of churches, we are "*to express the common concern of thechurches in the service of human need, the breaking down of barriers between people and the promotion of one human family in justice and peace"* (WCC Constitution).

Recognizing your difficulties at this critical juncture of your history, we are also reminded that we are called to be instruments of peace and agents of reconciliation and unity among all people in Syria. Be assured that the entire ecumenical family holds you constantly in prayer. This is an imperative of costly solidarity within the one body of Christ.

"The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4: 7).

- **Statement by WCC general secretary condemning the violence occurring in Syria, 29 May 2012**

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I express my deep pain over the massacre of innocent people and especially children that took place last Sunday in Taldou village, in the area of Houla, near Homs, in Syria. Together with the churches in our fellowship, we pray

that our Lord receives the victims in His mercy, and keeps their families and beloved ones in His Love, granting them courage and patience in their grieving.

We, as churches, cannot but condemn this inhumane act and manifest our feelings of solidarity with the families of the victims, mourning their beloved ones. We also pray for the whole Syrian people that our Lord may protect them and accompany them in their longing for dignity and freedom.

The cycle of violence in Syria has been going on for more than a year, and the number of innocent civilian persons killed, wounded and displaced has reached an unbearable level. Several times, the WCC has urgently called on the army and other government security agencies in Syria to cease the indiscriminate use of force, ensuring the citizens' right to free assembly and expression. The government of Syria, as all governments, has an obligation to protect its own citizens, and to protect their fundamental human rights and freedoms. The WCC has also called on all other parties to refrain from using violence, and urgently reiterates its call today.

What happened in the area of Houla two days ago during a protest is morally and ethically unacceptable, as is the case with previous violence in Homs and other areas. Those who are responsible for this massacre and other atrocities should be brought to justice. The WCC urges the international community to fully support the UN efforts to bring peace and to put an end to the cycle of violence.

During this Blessed Pentecost Season, where Christians all over the world realise "the mighty acts of God and the power of God to transform them and their world," (Pentecost 2012 message of the presidents of WCC), the WCC reiterates its deep condolences to the bereaved families of the Houla massacre, as well as to the Syrian people, praying and hoping that peace with justice will prevail soon in their country.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary, WCC

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Ban Ki-moon, secretary-general of the United Nations, requesting that the UN give a stronger and clearer mandate to Kofi Annan's initiative for peace in Syria, 25 June 2012**

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you in my capacity as general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), where we have, among our 349 member churches worldwide, an important number of historic churches in the Middle East region. They have been witnessing to God's love to humankind since the beginning of Christianity, and their continuous presence is crucial for Christians all over the world.

Today, we are deeply concerned by the rapidly deteriorating situation in Syria, and the unbearable level of violence it has reached very recently. The loss of thousands of civilian lives can no longer be met with verbal statements and with divided positions from the international community. We strongly believe that the United Nations has a primary role to play in keeping with its foundational mandate of peace-making and peace-building.

In this sense, we urge you to strengthen the Kofi Anan initiative by maintaining it while giving it a stronger and a clearer mandate, equipping it with a political plan and a firm and clear process led by the Security Council, which will be agreed upon by the international community for the transitional period.

It is only through an inclusive multilateral negotiated peace process that the worst can be avoided in Syria. We are confident that Your Excellency will be able to call the world leaders to save the people of Syria from more violence, killings and destruction and bring together the concerned parties to a common table, so that the Syrian people will be able to live in peace and dignity, and express its political will in complete freedom.

Wishing you all the success in your mission, we assure you that we are keeping you in our prayers, and we remain,

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary, WCC

- **Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on the crisis in Syria, Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012**

Ever since the people in Syria started their claim for reforms in the country in March 2011, the World Council of Churches has been closely following the developments in the country. The WCC affirms the principle that governments and civil society have a duty to protect the lives and dignity of all citizens. This basic obligation is clearly stipulated under international human right law according to the Geneva Conventions, which stipulates that even during conflicts, indiscriminate attacks on civilians by any party are not acceptable, and that combatants and non-combatants must be strictly distinguished. The crisis in Syria and the ongoing violence violates or negates these basic principles and obligations related to human rights and human dignity.

A message from the WCC executive committee addressed to the heads of churches in Syria, in February, 2012, affirmed the message by three heads of churches in Syria His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV, His Holiness Patriarch Zakka I, and His Beatitude Patriarch Gregorios III (issued on 15 December 2011) – in which they refused “the use of any type of violence” and called for the “respect of the principles of justice, freedom, human dignity, social justice and citizenship rights”.

Christians in Syria, as well as in the whole Middle East region, are indigenous, very much rooted to their traditions, and their continuous presence and witness have borne both challenge and responsibility throughout the country’s history. While underscoring this reality the executive committee of WCC expressed confidence that “the churches in Syria, which are deeply rooted in the land, and have developed a long historic experience of engagement in the life of the society, will have an important role in national dialogue especially in this critical and difficult moment”.

In a minute on “The presence and witness of Christians in the Middle East”, the central committee of WCC, in its meeting in February 2011, expressed the Council’s principles that guide its policy concerning the Middle East region: “God’s justice and love for all of creation,

the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths". The minute also noted that "political developments in the region point to signs of hope for democratic changes, respect for human rights and the rule of law in several countries". In this context we reaffirm the principle expressed by the central committee in 2011 that "peace and reconciliation must be conditioned by justice".

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012, therefore:

A. ***Calls*** for an end to the violence in all forms;

B. ***Urges*** all parties to honour and respect their commitments and obligations in regard to the right of all Syrian people to live in dignity and to fulfil their aspirations for peace and solidarity for their life together;

C. ***Calls*** for all parties to engage in dialogue – as the only solution – in order to safeguard the unity and pluralistic nature of historic Syria for a better future for generations to come, and in order to promote respect for the principles of justice, freedom, human dignity, social justice and citizenship rights;

D. ***Appeals*** to the international community to respect the ability and responsibility of the Syrian people to find solutions to the crisis, and to refrain from outside military interventions;

E. ***Encourages*** the UN peace plan initiative, and support the efforts of the UN envoy, Al Akhdar-Al Ibrahimi, hoping that peace will prevail;

F. ***Affirms*** that the Christian presence in the Middle East is part of the social and cultural constituency of the society they live in and have a historical role to play in building up a future society based on the mutual respect and dialogue of life;

G. ***Encourages*** the WCC member churches and related ministries in the ecumenical family to respond to the needs that many Syrians are experiencing in their challenge to provide for many of the basic necessities of life in this time of crisis, including refugees and internally displaced persons;

H. ***Prays*** for the reign of peace with justice in Syria and in all countries in the Middle East, so that peoples of different faiths live together in harmony and love, and manifest God's love for all of creation; "God of Life: Lead us to Justice and Peace".

• Statement by WCC general secretary condemning violence against religious leaders and religious communities, 28 June 2013

Manipulation of religion in the Syrian crisis

Recent reports from Syria indicate once more that religious communities are being targeted in acts of violence aimed at dividing and manipulating the nation. I write to underline the rejection by the World Council of Churches of any attempt to use religion as an instrument of psychological warfare, political strategy or intimidation.

As general secretary of the World Council of Churches, I am profoundly shocked and deeply concerned over the brutal murder on the evening of Saturday 22 June of Father François Mourad in the village of Al-Ghassaniyah. This killing seems to have been a targeted attack against the Monastery of St Anthony. I also extend my deep and sincere condolences to Fr François' family, his Franciscan brothers, as well as to the custos of the Holy Land, Fr PierbattistaPizzaballa and His Beatitude Ignatius Youssef III Younan, patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch. May Fr François' memory be eternal in our Lord's mind and in the heart of those who loved and knew him.

The Christian people of the village of Al-Ghassaniyah, as well as Father François himself, had desired to stay peacefully in this part of Syria, where they have lived for centuries, alongside local Muslim communities. Sadly and alarmingly, it is becoming apparent that foreign radical and terrorist elements are making use of the conflict in Syria and are deliberately targeting Christians, not sparing clergy and religious institutions and shrines. Their attacks are an attempt to sow interreligious tension, as are similar attacks that have taken place on Alawite, Shi'ite and Sunni communities and houses of worship, as well as the destruction in March of the oldest Jewish synagogue in Syria.

We have been assured by a number of Syrian Muslim leaders, with whom we are in regular contact and dialogue, of their horror at brutal actions which seem deliberately intended to create hostility between Christians and Muslims in Syria and the wider Middle East. We strongly encourage and invite them to condemn all those who seek to misuse Islam as a justification for aggression against neighbours, and especially against civilians. We remember how, in March 2011, the beginning of the peaceful uprising in Syria, reclaiming freedom, dignity and equal citizenship, seemed to be a sign of hope for the Syrian people and for the whole region. We are now looking at a completely different and tragic picture.

We continue to pray for the safe release of Metropolitan Mar Gregorios Youhanna Ibrahim and Metropolitan BoulosYazigi, abducted on April 22, of all those who are kidnapped, and of other political prisoners. I assure the people of Syria, and our member churches in the region, of the determination of the World Council of Churches to stand in solidarity with them at this very difficult time of pain and suffering.

- **Message from WCC general secretary condemning the use of chemical weapons and calling on the Syrian government and the UN to fulfil its responsibility to protect the Syrian people, 27 August 2013**

The spectre of chemical weapons recently used in the conflict in Syria against civilians has raised international alarms, led to calls for an investigation and met with strong condemnation from the World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary, who called on the United Nations to fulfil its responsibility to protect the Syrian people from gross human rights violations.

"No matter who is behind this attack, it is absolutely unconscionable that chemical weapons may have found their way into the conflict in Syria," said Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC general secretary on Tuesday, 27 August from the WCC offices in Geneva.

“As a worldwide fellowship of churches, including churches in Syria which have suffered greatly in the war, we roundly condemn the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances by either side.”

“There is no excuse for this, and enough is enough,” Tveit stated. “These last few days have shown again the brutality of this war, in which the innocent and ordinary people of Syria are paying an unbearable price.”

Nearly 1,300 people died from what appears to have been a gas attack of 21 August, in Ghouta, a suburb of the Syrian capital, Damascus, according to news reports.

Already, more than 100,000 people have died in the conflict, while 1.7 million have become refugees outside Syria and 1.5 million are displaced inside Syria. Half of those refugees and displaced people are under age 18 according to aid agency reports.

Hundreds have gone missing and been kidnapped, including two bishops, Archbishop Mar Yohanna Gregorios Ibrahim from the Syriac Orthodox Church and Archbishop Paul Yazigi from the Greek Orthodox Church, and three priests, the latest being Jesuit Father Paolo Dall'Oglio.

Tveit said the WCC calls for and supports the UN conducting a thorough and impartial investigation into the alleged gas attack, and calls upon the Syrian government to fulfil its role to protect its citizens.

It is important for the UN to have full access for their investigation, Tveit said.

Equally important, he said, is that the UN member states, especially the UN Security Council and its member states find a way to not only understand the responsibility to protect translates in this situation but to apply its principles for protecting the Syrian people.”

“I appeal to the UN and international community to work cooperatively for a negotiated political means to find a peaceful end to this conflict,” he added.

Tveit pointed to a 2006 statement of the WCC adopted at its 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where churches around the world called on the international community and individual governments to protect citizens from gross human rights violations.

The statement, “Vulnerable populations at risk: statement on the responsibility to protect,” says that the “prevention of catastrophic human insecurity requires attention to the root causes of insecurity as well as to more immediate or direct causes of insecurity. Broadly stated, the long-term agenda is to pursue human security and the transformation of life according to the vision of God's Kingdom.”

- **Open letter from WCC general secretary to the United Nations Security Council invoking prayers for peace and condemning the use of chemical weapons, 4 September 2013**

To the Honourable Members of the United Nations Security Council

Churches around the world pray and hope that there will be no escalation of the war in Syria through attacks from outside. In discussions with representatives of member churches and, over the last few days with Middle Eastern church leaders in Amman, Jordan at a conference to analyse the challenges facing Arab Christians in the Middle East, we have grown profoundly concerned by evidence of chemical weapons use in Syria and the prospect of retaliatory attacks against that country.

While condemning all use of chemical weapons, we must do everything possible to starve the fire of war rather than feeding it with further deadly armaments. The crime of using chemical weapons is to be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted.

However, an attack from outside Syria is likely to increase suffering and the risk of more sectarian violence, threatening every community in the nation including Christians. At this crucial time, the people of Syria and the Middle East need peace and not war. Weapons or military actions cannot bring about peace in Syria. The need of the hour is for the world to focus on how best to ensure security and protection for the people of Syria. There is no other way to sustainable justice and peace for the people of Syria than the hard work that must be undertaken by all parties inside and outside Syria to find a negotiated political solution. All people of good will must set aside our differences of opinion and interests in order to end the armed conflict in Syria as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of the international community to act now to do everything possible to find a nonviolent solution leading to a lasting peace. Particularly we encourage the leaders of the U.S.A. and of Russia to use the time as they meet in the coming days to agree on their contributions to a political process towards peace and justice for Syria.

No military attack or intervention will solve the crisis in Syria. Such a course is much more likely to raise the level of tension and increase pressure on the population at large. It can put certain groups at even higher risk, including Christians. In the absence of any legal premise for intervention in Syria, such as the invocation of the right of self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter or a UN Security Council resolution authorizing force, claiming humanitarian intervention as a legal basis is not sufficient in its own right.

We join the call of Pope Francis for dedicated prayer and work for peace in Syria, with a particular emphasis on Saturday, September 7.

WCC general secretary
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

- **Communiqué adopted at the WCC international consultation on the crisis in Syria, Geneva, 18 September 2013**

Church leaders from Syria, Russia, United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Turkey and representatives of international organizations in Geneva gathered for a World Council of Churches consultation on the crisis in Syria together with Mr Kofi Annan andthe Joint Representative for Syria, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi.

Churches worldwide have spoken out against the war in Syria. Now is the time to raise one voice for peace and work for a negotiated solution among all parties to the conflict. Blessed are the peace-makers, the Scriptures say. Churches must continue to raise their voice in their congregations and with their governments. We must strengthen the public outcry so that those in power will protect the common interest of humanity.

We believe there can be no military solution to the crisis in Syria. It is time for the international community to assume its responsibility to end the violence and initiate a political process that brings peace for all the people of Syria. Resolute action now is necessary to save lives; waiting has already cost many lives. Collective action for peace is needed to save not only the people of Syria but also the surrounding region as well.

We urge the United Nations Security Council to adopt without delay a resolution based on the 14 September agreement by the Russian and American foreign ministers. We call on the governments of Russia and the United States to exercise their major responsibility for peace, collaborating to convince national and foreign parties to the conflict to put an end to the violence and accept the multilateral compromises that are essential for peace.

The Security Council must also set a date for a second peace conference on Syria, building on the foundations agreed but not implemented after the peace conference in 2012in Geneva. Many tens of thousands more lives have been lost since then. Many thousands more lives are at stake now. To fail to reach conclusive results at the next Geneva conference is not an option.

The current openings for negotiations also need immediate steps to de-escalate the conflict, including the adoption of an arms embargo by the Security Council and measures to stop the flow of foreign combatants into Syria.

The humanitarian situation in Syria and in neighbouring countries is precarious. Humanitarian assistance is a vital aspect of the churches' mission and solidarity withthose suffering. Such aid also contributes toward a process of reconciliation. National, regional and international church ministries are alleviating the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Syrians affected by the war. It is important for church-related agencies to redouble their efforts now, including aid for refugees. Full humanitarian access is essential, as stipulated in the 2012 Geneva conference.

Christians in Syria are an integral part of a diverse society with a rich history. They have their place in civil society and commit themselves to build a future for Syria where citizens of all faiths enjoy equal rights, freedom and social justice. They are also committed to engage in constructive dialogues with other religious and ethnic communities so that Syria's pluralistic heritage is protected and secured. The WCC and the wider ecumenical family support such a process.

We join the people of Syria in prayer for a peaceful future for the country and the whole Middle East, and may our Lord keep them in His grace.

- **Call from WCC general secretary to pray for the safe return of persons recently abducted and kidnapped, 21 December 2013**

  Press release:

  The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary is calling on the council's 345 member churches and churches around the world to continue to pray for the safe return of the twelve abducted nuns from the Monastery of St Thecla in the historical town of Maaloula on 2 December 2013, as well as the two Archbishops of Aleppo in Syria Mar Yohanna Gregorios Ibrahim from the Syriac Orthodox Church and Archbishop Paul Yazigi from the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch who were kidnapped in April 2013 near Aleppo, Syria on their way back from a humanitarian mission.

  “As the Christmas season is upon us, it is important to remember in our prayers and thoughts that the 12 nuns and Archbishop Ibrahim and Archbishop Yazigi remain missing,” Tveit said on Friday.

  “The nuns and both archbishops are deeply missed by their church communities and families,” Tveit said. “The pain of this separation has added to the ongoing suffering inflected upon all people of Syria because of the conflict. It is very sad and tragic that thousands of Syrian peoples have disappeared in prisons.”

  The WCC calls on all the actors in the Syrian conflict to spare all civilians including religious people and not take them as human shields. The WCC calls also on the international community to stand in solidarity with all victims of kidnappings and forced disappearances and mobilize all their efforts in order to release them and prevent such events from taking place again.

  “We continue to pray that God will bring peace to Syria and an end to the suffering of millions of people throughout Syria who have lost their beloved ones, who have been disabled and injured, who have been internally displaced or have become refugees, who have lost their homes, their properties and their places of worship,” Tveit said.

North America

Canada

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Prime Minister Stephen Harper calling on the Canadian government to "listen carefully" to the concerns of Canada's Indigenous leaders, 11 January 2013**

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

I am writing on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC), raising a critical issue for the people of your country that is at the heart of our member churches in Canada and elsewhere. We have been made aware of the strong message and action of Attawapiskat First Nation Chief Theresa Spence concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. We also recognize the significance and the strength of the concerns of the Idle No More movement. Our member churches and the WCC strongly support and are attentive to this momentum for such important issues for your country and many countries in the world. We ask you to listen carefully to her and the First Nations Chiefs' concerns as she is calling on the Government of Canada to respect their right to self-determination and to respect and implement the treaties with Indigenous Peoples. These are genuine concerns for justice and peace; and, Canada has a significant role in the world wide work for justice for Indigenous Peoples.

The World Council of Churches has been involved for many years in the justice struggles of Indigenous Peoples. This has been an important issue for us since the WCC Sixth Assembly that took place in Vancouver, Canada in 1983. We deeply respect Chief Spence's courageous and selfless act. The movement has now been successful in drawing international attention to how historic and ongoing federal government policies and programmes contradict Indigenous practices, and how they may undermine Indigenous Peoples' rights and discriminate against First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in your country.

The WCC is encouraged by the attention and support this movement has generated. The national and global expressions of solidarity from non-Indigenous Peoples are a clear indication of how many people want to see oppression and marginalization of Indigenous Peoples replaced with just and equitable relationships.

We support the work of KAIROS, the ecumenical organization that works in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples on rights and justice issues.

We offer prayers for Chief Spence's wellbeing and for her continued strength, for all Indigenous leaders and for a fruitful meeting that will improve the relationships called for in the Final Report of the 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* – a relationship based on peace, friendship, sharing, respect and the mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities. We pray for you and your leadership, so significant these days for all peoples in your country and elsewhere.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

United States of America

- **Statement on churches' attitudes and responses to racism issued at the end of a conference organized by the WCC in partnership with the United Church of Christ (UCC) and Dutch missionary and diaconal agency, Kerk in Actie, 26–29 August 2010**

A theological challenge to the persistence of racism, caste-based discrimination, and other exclusionary practices

Statement from the WCC conference on racism today and the rationale for continued ecumenical engagement, Cleveland, Ohio August 26-29, 2010

The theological text which follows was developed in response to a four-day meeting of the "Racism today and the rationale for continued ecumenical engagement" conference, in Cleveland, Ohio, from August 26-30, 2010. Thirty participants, from fifteen countries, including lay and clergy persons, women and men, academics and activists who were engaged in racial reconciliation and other human rights issues, participated in this conference sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in partnership with the United Church of Christ in the United States of America and Kerk in Actie, the Netherlands. In Cleveland, we worshipped, meditated on some biblical passages, heard reports and presentations on the persistence of racism in several countries; the impact of caste-based discrimination in India; and the experience of discrimination against the Roma people in Europe. We also heard reports on the engagement of churches in anti-racism activities in Europe and the United States.

As a result of our hearing the ways in which discrimination in its various expressions continues to plague members of our churches and societies, we are convinced that the churches would be remiss in their mission if they failed to heed the cry of those who suffer under the oppression of racism and other forms of exclusion. Included with this theological justification is a list of suggested strategies for action which may help churches as they engage in the work of ending discrimination in our churches and our societies.

The persistence of discrimination

Despite the claim that in many nations a "post-racial" reality has been achieved, racism and similar instruments of discrimination continue to plague many populations throughout the world. People of African descent, the Dalits in South Asia, the Indigenous Peoples, the ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities in many places in the world continue to be more marginalized than before on account of the changing economic, political and social conditions that the present world has entailed. This is true even though human rights activism and liberation movements have made gains in highlighting these problems and some legislation has been enacted in an attempt to provide solutions. The legacy of discrimination and exclusionary practices persists, though sometimes in forms less obvious than in the past. The presence of these insidious forms of economic, social, cultural, and political exclusion reflects that the struggle against dehumanizing discriminatory practices continues and that our churches must assume a greater leadership role in challenging them in their old and new forms and guises.

Racism is sin

Racism, caste-based discrimination, and other exclusionary practices are inherently sinful because, on several levels, they subvert the double commandment: 'to love God and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 20:37-39)'. These exclusionary practices are expressions of self-deification on the part of those who practice them and, thereby, violate the First Commandment (Exodus 20:3) that states that we can have no other gods before the One True God, who creates, redeems, and sustains all, including us and those we consider as "them". These forms of discrimination deny the biblical witness of Genesis 1:26-27, which affirms that the human being is created in the image of God. These harmful exclusionary practices belie the reality that the socially constructed divisions we devise to separate ourselves from each other have no place in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Racism, caste-based discrimination, and other forms of discrimination foster hatred and violence – the very antithesis of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and a negation of our faith in God who gave us life and sent his son to ensure life for all, in all its abundance (John 10:10).

These sinful practices of dehumanizing exclusion are governed by a denial of the blessedness of the rich diversity within the creation itself, where each kind of living thing was named and pronounced "good" (Genesis 1). Diversity within the good creation is a reflection of the value of diversity within the very life of the triune God, who creates, preserves, and loves in freedom and abundance. The biblical witness enjoins us to celebrate the blessedness of diversity as a gift (Romans 12) designed to bless the churches and the communities which they serve. Wherever and whenever we reject these instances of God's fecundity and abundance, we deny the very nature of the God we claim to profess.

The churches' responses

We note and celebrate the various ways in which some of our churches have been working diligently not only to challenge diverse forms of discrimination, but have also initiated programs designed to promote greater understanding and acceptance across multicultural and religious lines. However, the churches have not done as much as they should in addressing racial and other exclusionary practices *within their own ranks*. This is a state of affairs which cannot continue if the churches are to have any credibility in their claim to be the Body of Christ. Because the very nature of racial and other forms of discrimination entails levels of economic, social, and political marginalization which create profound suffering and life-long hardship, our local and national churches cannot continue to ignore this nightmarish reality in which men, women, and children of God are condemned to live. The entire Body of Christ has a prophetic task to denounce by word *and* deed <u>all</u> forms and expressions of existence which constrain the reality of the abundant life which God offered to us in Jesus Christ. Our failure to do so constitutes disobedience to the God we endeavor to serve through faithful discipleship.

Faithful discipleship in a discriminatory world

Faithful discipleship reflects the loving nature of God and models the way of Jesus Christ in thought, word, and deed toward humankind and all creation. Discipleship, grounded in the principles of justice, reconciliation, and unity, can transform local and national churches. In turn, transformed faith communities can contribute to the elimination of racism and other forms of discrimination in our interpersonal relationships and the social structures which frame our lives.

Some of our churches continue to define themselves as the place where the Word of God is rightly preached and the sacraments are administered properly. However, such a restricted

notion of the nature of the church fails to recognize that the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments are not ends unto themselves but rather the means of grace by which we are strengthened to live out the demands of Christian discipleship. Through these means of grace we are empowered to exercise our love of neighbor by being attentive to the spiritual, bodily, and communal needs of those near and far. When racism, caste-based discrimination, ethnocentrism, marginalization of indigenous populations, prejudice against the Roma people, and anti-Muslim sentiment are allowed to persist in both obvious and subtle forms, then the local and national churches have abandoned their mission. When Christ's disciples fail to call into question personal prejudices, discriminatory practices, and dehumanizing social structures in their midst, then the churches have extinguished their light; their salt has lost its savor; and the glory of God has been obscured.

The cost of continued denial or ignorance of the reality or prevalence of racism, caste-based discrimination, and other forms of exclusionary practices means death to the most vulnerable in our societies. Such denials condemn millions to extreme poverty and lead to devastating disparities in access to economic and political power, educational opportunities, quality healthcare, decent housing, gainful employment, a pollution-free environment, and other benefits of civil society. Such denials guarantee that too many children and youth will have their potential stolen by premature death either through disease, senseless violence, lengthy incarceration, and a permanent ethos of hopelessness.

Advocacy as an expression of discipleship

We concede that it may be easier to talk about "racism" in the abstract, but much harder to acknowledge the actual existence and activities of *racists* within our own communities. However, as faithful disciples we must love not just spiritually but also express that love economically, socially, and politically as well. By our concrete acts of engagement with those whom society labels as inferior, we come face-to-face with our own propensity to live and even worship in ways that support or sustain sinful discrimination. We must be willing to be "agents of discomfort" within our communities of faith to facilitate the spiritual transformation required to participate in the struggle of liberation from racism, caste-based discrimination, and other devastating forms of exclusion. If we commit ourselves to walk in the Spirit of Christ, we can be led to the level of repentance that facilitates true conversion, and brings liberation to the oppressed as well as the oppressors.

Furthermore, members of dominant communities must be willing to assume responsibility for the privilege they have enjoyed as descendants of those who practised these and other overt forms of exclusion in the past, and which continue in various guises in our time. This includes the honest examination of attitudes and practices for the purpose of assuming responsibility for the spirit of exclusion in one's own hearts. For those who have been truly converted to an anti-discrimination stance, there must also be a willingness to engage one's own circle of family, friends, churches, and neighborhoods to oppose racist language, practices, and customs which perpetuate exclusion. However, we cannot stop at the gate of personal examination and personal confrontation. The Body of Christ must also challenge the systemic structures of society which imbed exclusion either implicitly or explicitly, intentionally or inadvertently, and hold those in power accountable. Such advocacy is a prophetic activity of the churches that constitutes concrete support to our sisters and brothers who experience the violence of exclusion in their bodies, minds, and spirit.

Accompaniment and prophetic witness

We who have privilege must surrender our attachment to it in order to accompany those who, historically and currently, have been excluded from privilege. The prophetic task of the churches not only calls us to renounce the workings of economic, cultural, social, and political structures buttressed by discrimination, but also to energize the people of God with the proclamation of an alternative vision of life in community. We also acknowledge with thanksgiving that adherents to other faith traditions, and even some secular organizations, have an established record of engagement in the work to end all forms of discrimination; and maintain that our collaboration with their efforts is important. However, the uniqueness of the churches' task is the witness we have of the in-breaking of the reign of God which Jesus announced and called us to proclaim. The proclamation of the coming of God's redeemed community denounces personal conduct, communal practices, and systemic structures of exclusion. The proclamation of God's shalom encourages and energizes those who long for right relationships between others locally, nationally, and internationally, to remain steadfast in the struggle.

If we are to be known by our love for others (John 13:34-35), this love is concretely expressed in our defence of the excluded against that which denies their sacredness as being created in the image of God. For those who submit to the grace that has and continues to defeat the powers that contribute to death and destruction of those who suffer under various forms of exclusion, we are met with the very peace that Christ brings (John 20:21).

The criteria by which Christ will receive us as one of his own are not new to us. What we do to contribute to the flourishing of others will be viewed as having been done to Christ (Matthew 25). The kind of worship which God desires from us is no secret. True worship is that which leads us to seek the wellbeing, dignity, and fullness of life for those among us whose existence is circumscribed by the kind of discrimination that leads to economic, cultural, social, religious, and political marginalization (Isaiah 58). Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves impels us to make the suffering of our sisters and brothers *our* business. The Lord has already told us what we are required to do: to love justice, to do mercy, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Let us do it!

What we must do!

Below is a list of some strategies for churches, and ecumenical organizations in their actions against racism, caste-based discrimination, and other forms of exclusion. The strategies are arranged in three categories: Outward Strategies (church and society), Inward Strategies (Intra-personal), and Strategies for WCC as a fellowship of churches.

A. Outward strategies

1. Expose and deconstruct race theories that negate the values of justice and equity in human relationships.
2. Highlight the United Nations declarations that advocate for the elimination of racism and casteism, and hold the governments accountable for their effective implementation.
3. Engage politically to assert the rights of the excluded people to participate and hold office in political processes.
4. Support social education programmes and advocacy efforts.
5. Engage in education on peace and justice in schools.

6. Make people aware of the laws intended to reduce or eliminate racism, and engage publically to enforce those laws.
7. Link the healing of racism and casteism to the continuum of contrition – repentance – confession – forgiveness – reconciliation.
8. Hold racism and sexism together as well as other instruments and cultures of discrimination.
9. Work through organizations to build a more just and sustainable world by integrating social values into corporate and investor actions. (e.g. www.iccr.org)
10. Develop inter-church partnerships to uphold the values of inclusivity.

B. Inward Strategies

11. Encourage groups who are marginalized on account of their identities, and their churches to hold series of talks among themselves, a) about the pain of having to adjust to racist and caste-centered environments or pressures, and b) how that pain restricts their abilities to move forward in freedom and liberation.
12. Facilitate generational discussions where each generation identifies the pain they feel from their particular experiences, and develops strategies from those experiences to eliminate racism and casteism.
13. Encourage members of the dominant power groups to converse with each other through transformational experiences and journeys to discover how racism and casteism have harmed their capacities to engage Jesus' abundant life and live more fully as image-bearers of God in community with all image-bearers of God.
14. Create safe spaces for people to discuss pain they otherwise avoid and to reveal histories they otherwise would keep buried.

C. Strategies for the WCC

15. Review and re-imagine the relationship of WCC to its member churches to find ways to increase WCC's coordinating ability to bring in diverse voices committed to the vision of a just and inclusive world.
16. Facilitate debate on what "ecumenism" means today with a view to recognize the challenges as well as prospects for continued engagement.
16. Create within WCC a volunteer association of member churches that:a. Commit themselves to become anti-racist and inclusive institutions, and b. Sharewith each other their plans for and progress in transitioning to become anti-racist and inclusive.

- **Message from WCC general secretary, honouring the anniversary of 11 September 2001, 7 September 2011**

Ten years ago, thousands of people from more than 90 countries were killed in a coordinated assault on targets in the United States of America. These events on 11 September 2001 and the consequences of what happened that day – including wars centred in Afghanistan and Iraq – deeply scarred the first decade of the 21st century and have left a legacy of pain, grief, disorder and enmity.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I write to assure all those who have been affected by violence and inhumanity – in the United States and throughout the world – of continuing prayer and solidarity on the part of the fellowship of churches we constitute. As a Norwegian who experienced tragedy within my own homeland this past summer, I appreciate the power and meaning to be found in supportive prayers and other expressions of compassion.

Terrorism in all its forms – whether committed by individuals, groups or states – is to be condemned. But one may reasonably ask how best to respond. Perpetrators should be brought to justice and security measures devised to prevent the repetition of such trauma. Many of us remain convinced that nonviolence can be the most helpful long-term response to violence and the most effective means toward a lasting peace based on justice.

We in the ecumenical movement have dedicated ourselves to dialogue among people of different faiths, and in this context especially to dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims. There is great power and importance in religion, yet on this anniversary we must admit that belief can be twisted and perverted to fuel hatred, terror and war. The World Council of Churches is preparing for its 10th Assembly in 2013 and has adopted an assembly theme in the form of a prayer: "God of life, lead us to justice and peace." Life, justice and peace are high ideals in every religion deserving of the name, and we appeal to religious leaders and people of goodwill to join us in building strong relationships based on human dignity and mutual respect.

In October 2001, the World Council of Churches commissioned an ecumenical "Living Letters" team to visit the United States and help to comfort its grieving people. At the conclusion of this visit, the team spoke in a pastoral letter of building "a culture of peace". On this anniversary we re-dedicate ourselves to dialogue and cooperation in search of Just Peace. Establishing peace is the surest path to true victory over those who on 11 September, 2001 sought to inaugurate an era of division and death. Together, let us proclaim that their aims have been rejected.

As Jesus taught, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" ... and, "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they will be called children of God."

God of life, lead us to justice and peace! Amen.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member communions of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, invoking prayers for the people affected by Hurricane Sandy, 1 November 2012**

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
Psalm 121:1-2

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Like many around the world, I have observed the tremendous force of Hurricane Sandy that has afflicted millions of people from the Caribbean to the United States of America and into Canada. I write to assure you of the prayers of the World Council of Churches for all those who have been affected, particularly those who have lost loved ones or who now find themselves without a home. In this time of recovery when so many local churches are working together to offer emergency relief and support, we see a poignant reminder of how important the common witness and service of the ecumenical family is to our communities.

May the God of Life offer blessing and comfort to those who have suffered loss and those who seek to serve them.

Yours in our common Lord, crucified and risen,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to Barack Obama following his re-election as president of the United States, 7 November 2012**

Dear Mister President,

On behalf of the member churches of the World Council of Churches in all continents and regions of the globe, I write to offer you congratulations on your re-election, and to wish you all the blessings of God's grace as you continue your work during the presidential term ahead. Our prayers are with you and your team as you dedicate yourselves to faithful public service over the next four years.

We greet you at this turning point with a well-known verse from the prophet Micah: *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the* Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8, New Revised Standard Version)

In confident hope, we pray for you, for your family and your administration, as for all people on earth, in these words that form the theme of the upcoming 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Busan, Korea in the autumn of 2013: "*God of life, lead us to justice and peace*." Amen.

As president of the United States, you can exercise remarkable influence in promoting and establishing justice and peace throughout the earth. And so we pray that the God of life will lead you, as you lead your nation, into the ways of justice and peace. In particular, we pray that you may provide inspired leadership within the international community in the quest for peace with equal justice and mutual respect in Israel and Palestine.

May the Almighty God bless you and keep you through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the love of Jesus Christ our Lord, I remain,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

- **Message of condolence and support from WCC general secretary for the people of Sandy Hook and Newtown, in the wake of the school shooting in Connecticut, 17 December 2012**

How long, O Lord? … How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? (Psalm 13:1-2)

Grace to you and peace, through the love of God who weeps with us in every time of sorrow and sustains us in all the seasons of this life.

Writing on behalf of the World Council of Churches and its 349 member churches around the globe, I wish to convey the assurance that individuals and families throughout the world are devoting their thoughts and prayers to the memory of those who were lost in Friday's senseless shootings, and to the healing of those who have been left behind, to the mending of injured bodies, hearts and minds.

Our thoughts and prayers focus on Sandy Hook and Newtown, and we long to offer our support to you and your communities. In these difficult days we wish to say that we stand with you in spirit, and that God is with you always.

We are deeply grateful to the Connecticut churches, synagogues, mosques and other houses of prayer and service that have dedicated themselves to direct support of families, neighbours and the broader communities surrounding Sandy Hook Elementary School. Their witness is an encouragement to us all.

Last year, I was in my native Norway when a deranged gunman massacred a great many young people and adults in the capital and on a nearby island. In the aftermath, we Norwegians were shocked by the tragedy, yet we were moved by the way people of various beliefs came together. We were all too aware that evil and death are inescapably real. But we slowly came to appreciate the reality of life and love, as well.

God is love, and God calls us to love and serve one another.

We commend all who stand vigil with those in pain. With mourners everywhere, we cry out, "How long, O Lord, how long?" And we support and pray for community and national leaders who are asking hard questions, hoping to prevent future tragedies.

May you be aware of God's presence among you, however circumstances may numb your senses and bring even love into doubt. May you find friends and companions on this difficult journey, and again discover the road that leads to life.

Now and always, may the blessing of Almighty God, whom we Christians know in the persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you forever. Amen.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

CCIA MEMBERSHIP

Mr Roel Aalbersberg	ICCO & Kerk in Actie
Mrs Justina Yuo Dze Abeng	Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
Mr Joyanta Adhikari	Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh
Bishop Niels Henrik Arendt	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark
Rev. Dick Avi	United Church in Papua New Guinea
Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik	The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights
Prof. Dr Sooil Chai	Hanshin University
Dr Berhé Tesfu Costantinos	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
Rev. Didier Crouzet	Eglise Réformée de France
Bishop Duleep Kamil De Chickera	Anglican Church
Rev. Shirley Elaine DeWolf	Africa University
Mrs Noemi Espinoza	Reformed Church in Honduras
Rev. Noel Osvaldo Fernández	Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network
Ms Kathryn Fournier	Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada
Rev. Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel	Diakonisches Werk der EKD
Ms Tsovinar Ghazaryan	Armenian Apostolic Church (Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin)
Ms Sepiuta Hala'api'api	Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia
Most Rev. Dr Josiah Atkins Idowu-Fearon	Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Rev. Dr Carlos Intipampa Aliaga	Iglesia Evangélica Metodista en Bolivia
Rev. Dr Yawo Senyéebia Kakpo	Eglise évangélique presbytérienne du Togo
Mr Thomas Hyeono Kang	Fundaçao de Economia e Estatistica
Ms Karimi Kinoti	Christian Aid - Kenya
Mrs Vanna Kitsinian	Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia)
Mr Masimba Lovemore Kuchera	Students Solidarity Trust
Prof. Dr Vladimir R. Legoyda	Moscow State University of International Relations
Ms Mae Maureen Malecdan	National Council of Churches in the Philippines
Ms Lina Moukheiber	Saint George Hospital
Mr Lukasz Nazarko	Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church
Rev. Elenie Poulos	Uniting Church in Australia
Dr Audeh B. Quawas	Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem
Rev. Dr Dan Sandu	Romanian Orthodox Church
Mr André Francious September	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
Rev. Dr Andrea Zaki Stephanous	Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services
Mr Jonathan R. Ulanday	United Methodist Church
Dr Emily Welty	Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
H.G. Bishop Youannes	Coptic Orthodox Church
Rev Dr Tony Richie	Church of God
Rev. Dr T. DeWitt Smith Jr.	Trinity Baptist Church of Metro Atlanta

CCIA STAFF & INTERNS

GENEVA AND NEW YORK (BETWEEN 2010 AND 2013)

GENEVA

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, Mar Thoma Syrian Church, India
CCIA director

Ms Rima Barsoum, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East
programme executive, Christian Muslim Relations (to June 2011)

Mr Jonathan Frerichs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, U.S.A.
programme executive, Peace-building and Disarmament

Ms Semegnish Asfaw Grosjean, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
research associate (to February 2013), programme executive (from March 2013)

Ms Carla Khijoyan, Armenian Apostolic Church, Holy See of Cilicia, Lebanon
programme executive, Church and Ecumenical Relations & Middle East Advocacy (June 2010 – December 2011)

Mr Nigussu Legesse, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
programme executive for Africa (from June 2010)

Mr Michel Nseir, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, Lebanon
programme executive, Special Focus on the Middle East

Ms Christina Papazoglou, Ecumenical Patriarchate, Greece
programme executive, Human Rights

Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana, Alliance of Babtists, Sri Lanka
programme executive, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation (January – December 2010)

Mr Ranjan Solomon
Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) communications officer (January – December 2010)

Mr Manuel Quintero Perez
Coordinator (consultant), Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI)

Ms Nan Braunschweiger
Co-ordinator, International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) (to March 2012)

Ms Anne-Marie Vuignier-James
EAPPI programme associate (to August 2013)
EAPPI advocacy officer (from September 2013)

Ms Wenona Arndt (to January 2011)
Ms Maria Baile Rubio (September 2010 – August 2011)
Ms Nan Braunschweiger (from April 2012)
Ms Patricia Bruschweiler
Ms Greta Hovda (to April 2012)
Ms Beatrice Merahi
Ms Alexandra Pomezny (to December 2011)
Ms Marietta Ruhland (to September 2012)
Project assistants

Ms Jasmine Bostock, U.S.A. (March – August 2010)
Mr GregoriosGregoriou, Greece (March – July 2010)
Mr MeenaShawky, Egypt (from January 2013)
Interns

NEW YORK
Rev. Christopher Ferguson, United Church of Canada
Representative to the United Nations in New York, WCC UN Liaison Office (to December 2010)

Ms Margareta Grape, Church of Sweden
Representative to the United Nations in New York, WCC UN Liaison Office (February 2011 – December 2013)

Ms Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee (to September 2010)
Mr Geronimo Desumala (from October 2010)
Programme associates and office administrators

Mr Daniel Pieper
Research associate, Arms Trade Treaty campaign manager (July 2011 – June 2012)

ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Council of Churches
ACT	Action by Churches Together (ACT)
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
CCC	Caribbean Conference of Churches
CCIA	Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC
CEC	Conference of European Churches
CLAI	Latin American Council of Churches
CWS	Church World Service
DOV	Decade to Overcome Violence
EAPPI	Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MECC	Middle East Council of Churches
NCCCUSA	National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
PCC	Pacific Conference of Churches

THE CHURCHES IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Ranging across the globe, this vital compendium of documents covers an astonishing array of engagement by Christian churches through the World Council of Churches and its Commission of the Churches in International Affairs: war and peace, regional and national conflicts, disarmament and nuclear weapons, violence against women, economic justice, climate justice, freedom of religion, religious intolerance, ethnic and indigenous people's struggles—the list goes on.

Reflecting the fundamental Christian responsibility to respond to political realities, the CCIA has since 1946 been the chief instrument of the ecumenical movement's international voice and advocacy. In the years 2010-2013, the CCIA addressed an enormous number of emerging issues while giving particular attention to the politicization of religion, the rights of religious minorities, the framework of just peace, migrant workers and stateless persons, and to various conflict-affected areas to accompany people and communities suffering and struggling for peace with justice, human rights and human dignity.

ISBN 978-2-8254-1652-5

World Council of Churches Publications